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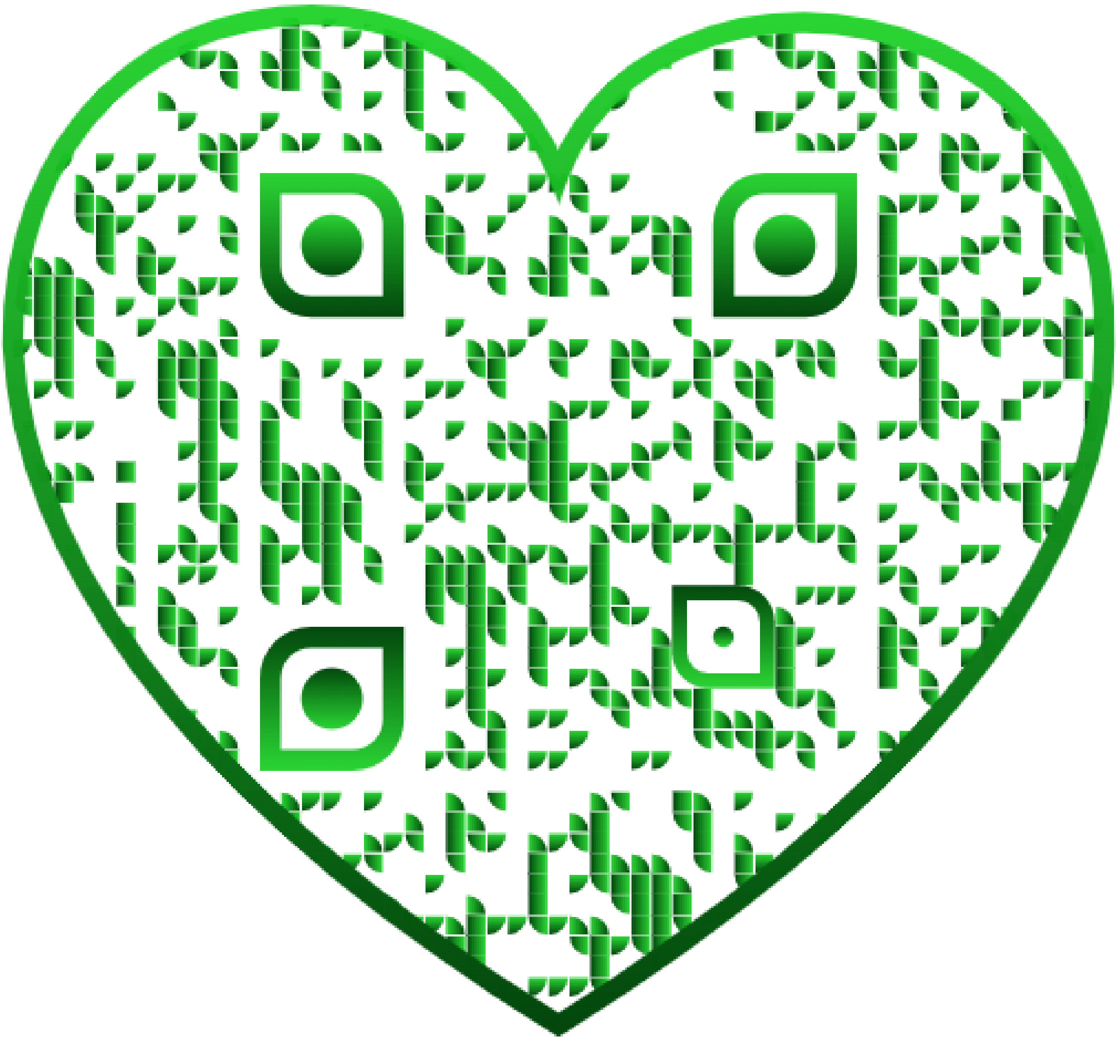

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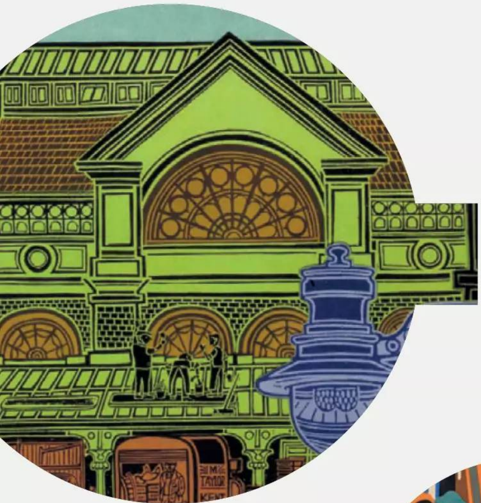

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THE OFFICIAL MAGAZINE
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Cover image: The beautiful gardens at Highgrove © GAP/ Highgrove/Robert Smith

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Beaumaris Castle

EDITOR'S LETTER

An Englishman's home is his castle, as the saying goes, and this issue we feature a wealth of wonderful English homes, both big and small. St James's Palace, once the main seat of the British monarchy and still home to members of the royal family, has recently opened its doors to the public for the first time; join us on a tour of its gilded halls on *p44*. We also speak to the chatelaine of Highclere Castle about life in such a historic house, and the much-anticipated return of *Downton Abbey* (*p22*). And you'll find an array of castles across the issue too, from romantically moated beauties (*p56*) to the mighty fortresses that line the border between England and Wales in the scenic Wye Valley (*p72*).

But it's not all castellated grandeur. If you love quaint cottages, turn to *p39* for some of Britain's loveliest examples, with all the wonky walls, wood beams and quirky charm you could wish for. Whether attached to handsome manors or even a certain royal retreat, the best gardens of the Cotswolds also have a rambling, cottagey charm; see *p14* for some truly enchanting examples. And on a smaller scale still is *The Jam Butty* narrowboat, whose owners travel England's canals, making and selling their homemade preserves as they go; meet them on *p67*.

From castles to cottages, and everything in between – enjoy the issue!

Natasha

Natasha Foges, Editor

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56 **TREASURE ISLANDS** Whether built as a line of defence, a display of status or simply as somewhere to keep the swans, a castle moat is a sight to behold

67 **HAPPY WANDERERS** Meet the travelling jam makers who combine a love of cooking with a passion for narrowboats on their much-loved barge, *The Jam Butty*

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PHOTOS: © ROYAL COLLECTION ENTERPRISES LIMITED 2025/ROYAL COLLECTION TRUST/WILL PRYCE/ STEVE RENNIE/JUSTIN FOULKES/OLIVIA BRABBS PHOTOGRAPHY

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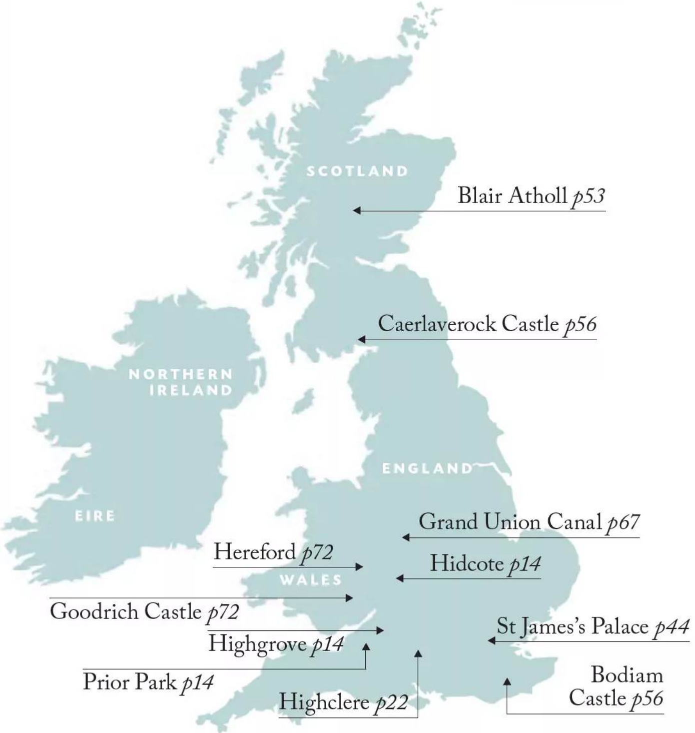
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YOUR LETTERS

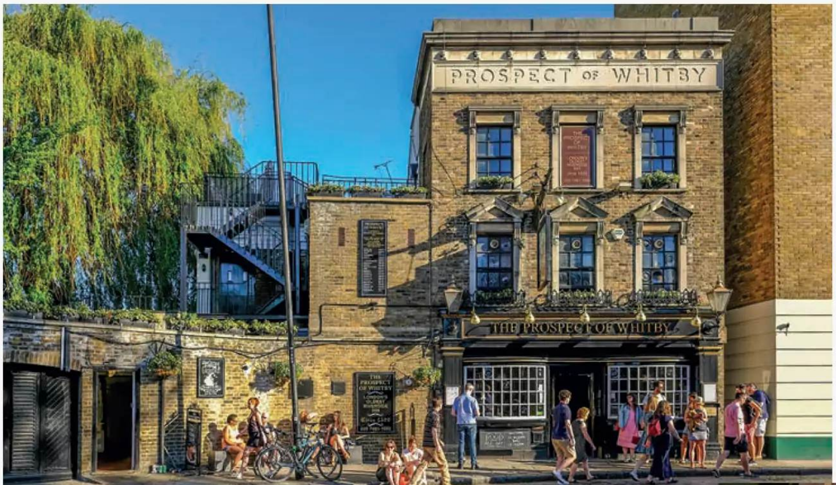
Write to us with your thoughts on the magazine and memories of Britain

STAR LETTER A PINT AT THE PROSPECT

While the 'Essex girl' Helen Mirren [Vol 93 Issue 3] has long been a favorite of mine, what brought back memories was the picture of the Prospect of Whitby. On one of my trips to Great Britain years ago I was checking out the pubs of east London and wandered into the Prospect for a couple of pints and food. After a good meal I asked one of the bartenders if it was OK to get a picture of the bar, and he said it was. When I took the picture the other bartender wanted to know if I had him in the picture, and I replied that I had. He then said that he usually received five pounds for being photographed, which I agreed was fair and that he should put it on my tab and that I would pay it on my next visit.

This got a laugh from all. I visited the Prospect of Whitby several years later, but the bartender had moved to another pub, and I didn't have to pay that tab.

Ray Jenkins, Fort Collins, Colorado, USA



Hidden Treasures of the National Trust

Our star letter wins a copy of *Hidden Treasures of the National Trust* by Anna Groves, published to celebrate the hugely successful BBC documentary of the same name, which explores some of the Trust's most prized objects and places (*£25, harpercollins.co.uk*).

PHOTO: © JOHANNA CUOMO/ALAMY

QUICK QUIZ

Put the kettle on – it's quiz time! The answers can all be found in this issue of *BRITAIN* (and you'll also find the answers below).

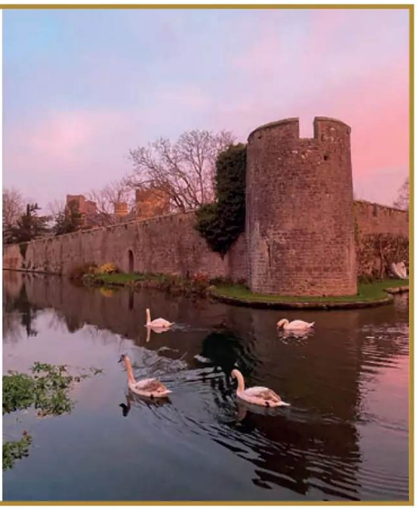
① Which king was on the throne during the Edwardian age?

② What have the swans in the moat of the Bishop's Palace in Wells been trained to do?

- a) Ring a bell for food
- b) Swim in formation
- c) Sing in chorus

③ Which Scottish poet portrayed the Devil as a bagpiper?

ANSWERS: 1. Edward VII **2.** a) Ring a bell for food **3.** Robert Burns



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REMEMBERING DUNKIRK

Thank you very much for the feature on 'the little ships' [Vol 93 Issue 3]. My family owes its very existence to the fact that both my father and father-in-law, who never actually met, were rescued from Dunkirk during those tumultuous few days. Had it not been so, neither my husband nor I would ever have been born. We shall be eternally grateful to all those brave sailors and civilians who mounted the biggest rescue mission in history, even though my father used to joke that he was so seasick on the way back across the Channel that he had actually wished for someone to put him out of his misery. The attached photo shows that he soon got over that!

Maggie Cobbett, Ripon, North Yorkshire, UK

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THE BULLETIN

Edible London landmarks , royal gold and a favourite Paddington haunt

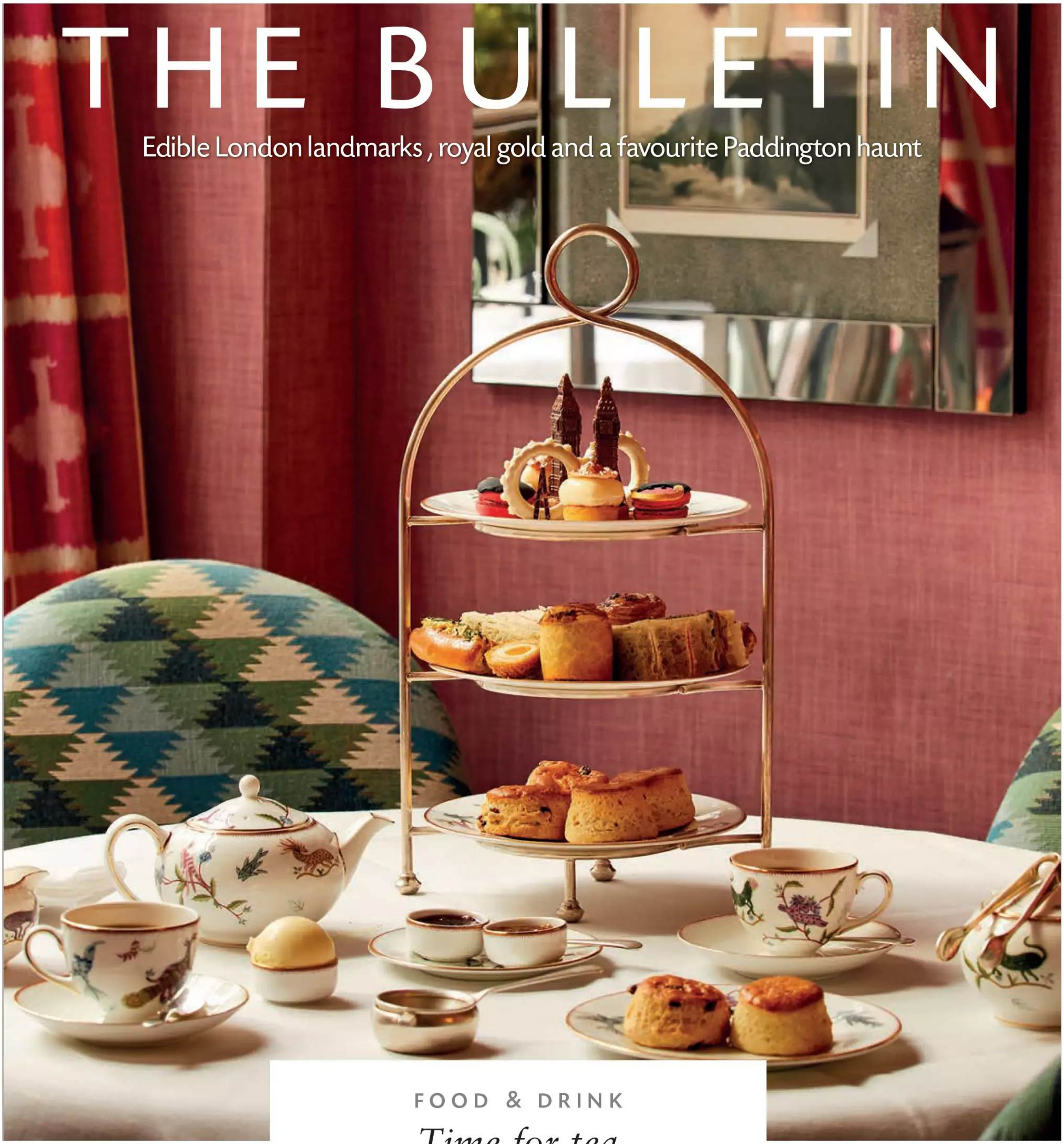

PHOTO: © FIRMDALE HOTELS

FOOD & DRINK

Time for tea

No visit to the capital is complete without an indulgent afternoon tea – and all the better if the sandwiches, scones and cakes celebrate our favourite London landmarks. The new 'London Calling' afternoon tea, served daily at the Haymarket Hotel, is a quintessentially English affair that begins with tea and dainty finger sandwiches, progresses to the obligatory scones with jam and cream, and concludes with a sweet tribute to the city's sights. Looking almost too good to eat, these include a blackberry macaron King's Guard, a chocolate-and-orange-encased Big Ben, a cinnamon-flavoured London Eye, and one of Trafalgar Square's famous lions in Victoria sponge cake form. And if you're in need of a stroll after eating your way through London's landmarks, you can pick up an illustrated map and embark on your own self-guided London tour, specially created for the hotel.
firmdalehotels.com

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The Midas touch

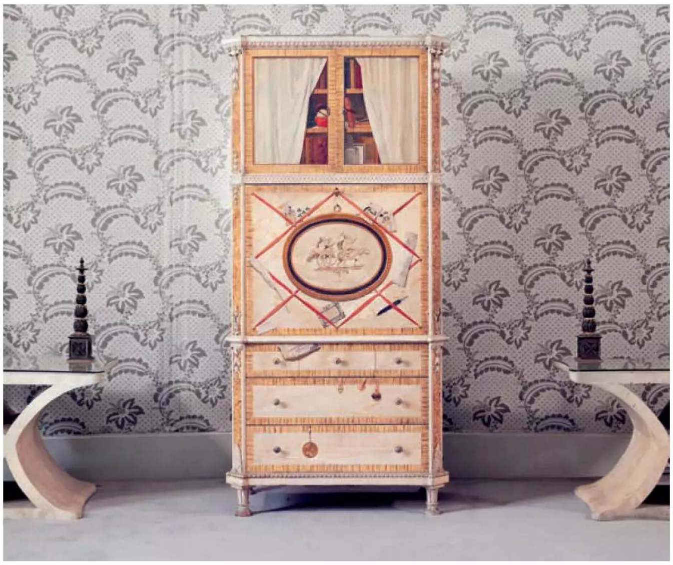
For the first time in more than 25 years, gold from the historic Clogau St David's gold mine, which is famous for producing wedding rings for the royal family, has been successfully mined once again. The mine has provided the gold for royal wedding bands since 1923, including those worn by Queen Elizabeth The Queen Mother, Queen Elizabeth II, Princess Margaret, Princess Anne and Diana, Princess of Wales. To commemorate the milestone, Alba Mineral Resources, who acquired the rights to the mine in 2018, minted three exclusive 1oz Tyn-y-Cornel gold coins made entirely from the new Welsh gold. The first gold coin fetched an impressive £20,000 at auction in April; at the time of writing the other two are yet to be sold.
alba.irostrum.auction

ALICE'S
THE BEST VALUE IN THE BRITISH ISLES

FILM & TV

Paddington's place

Paddington Bear might originally hail from darkest Peru, but as any self-respecting fan knows, he made his home in London. And today, the real-life 'Mr Gruber's Antique Shop' from the *Paddington* film series, in a prime position on London's Portobello Road in Notting Hill, is up for sale. The property is, in real life as on film, home to an antiques shop, Alice's Antiques, a treasure trove that's famous for its colourful and eccentric style; as well as its starring role in *Paddington*, the shop appeared in the cult film *The Italian Job* (1969). Above the abundance of antiques is a two-storey maisonette, owned by the same family for three generations. The property is on the market for a whopping £3.95 million. As a certain bear might say, that's a lot of marmalade sandwiches.
knightfrank.co.uk



HISTORIC HOMES

Lady of letters

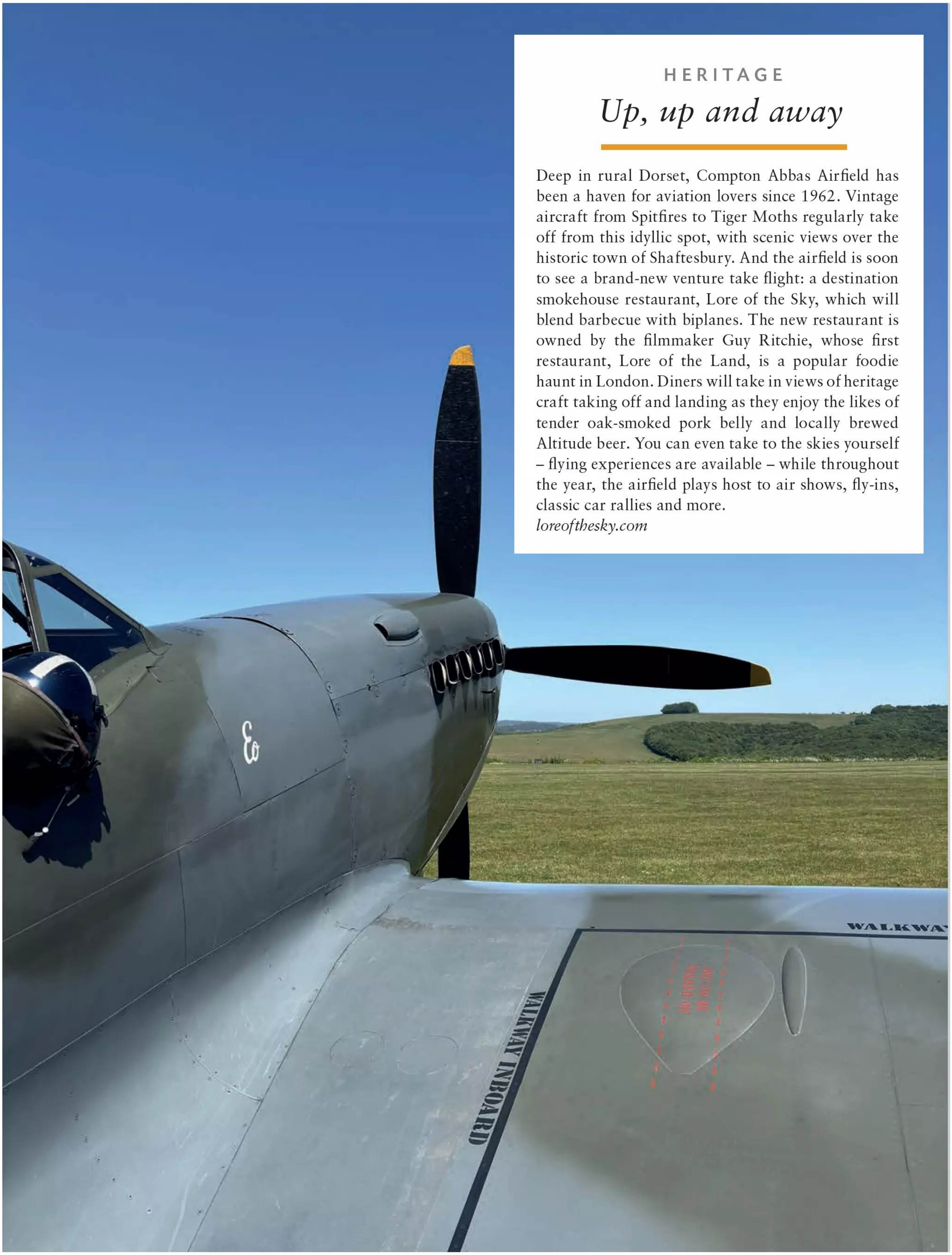
Leeds Castle in Kent was called the "loveliest castle in the world" by historian Lord Conway in 1913, and unsurprisingly, the description has stuck ever since. The castle has recently unveiled a suitably lovely piece of furniture that once belonged to its former owner, American heiress Olive, Lady Baillie, who bought the castle in the 1920s. The writing desk is from Lady Baillie's 'lost collection' and will now go on public display for the first time in its history. An exquisite pastel-coloured writing desk (*secretaire à abattant*), it was designed by the esteemed 20th-century designer Stéphane Boudin and delicately painted with trompe l'oeil details. Sold off following Lady Baillie's death in 1974, it has recently been acquired by the Leeds Castle Foundation, to be reunited with two commodes designed by Boudin that are already in situ within the castle.
leeds-castle.com

PHOTO: © TOM FERGUSON/ALAMY/WILL WIDEN

HERITAGE

Up, up and away

Deep in rural Dorset, Compton Abbas Airfield has been a haven for aviation lovers since 1962. Vintage aircraft from Spitfires to Tiger Moths regularly take off from this idyllic spot, with scenic views over the historic town of Shaftesbury. And the airfield is soon to see a brand-new venture take flight: a destination smokehouse restaurant, Lore of the Sky, which will blend barbecue with biplanes. The new restaurant is owned by the filmmaker Guy Ritchie, whose first restaurant, Lore of the Land, is a popular foodie haunt in London. Diners will take in views of heritage craft taking off and landing as they enjoy the likes of tender oak-smoked pork belly and locally brewed Altitude beer. You can even take to the skies yourself – flying experiences are available – while throughout the year, the airfield plays host to air shows, fly-ins, classic car rallies and more.
loreofthesky.com



Creamy yogurt served alongside complements the warmth of the kebabs

RECIPE

Saffron Chicken Kebabs

MAKES 6

INGREDIENTS

- *1kg skinless boneless chicken thighs*
- *2 large pinches of saffron strands*
- *1 lemon*
- *½ tsp paprika*
- *2 garlic cloves, finely grated*
- *200g Greek yogurt*
- *2 tbsp extra virgin olive oil*
- *Salt and freshly ground pepper*

Garlic yogurt

- *250g Greek yogurt*
- *2 tbsp tahini*
- *1 garlic clove, finely grated*
- *Juice of 1 lemon*
- *1 tbsp finely chopped flat-leaf parsley*

The BBQ Book (Bloomsbury Publishing, £25), by Britain's best-loved Michelin-starred chef, Tom Kerridge, brings you the ultimate recipes for every barbecue, from smoky charred veg to flavour-packed marinated meats, and everything in between. In this recipe, succulent chunks of chicken are marinated in yogurt mildly spiced with saffron, paprika and garlic.

METHOD

Cut the chicken thighs into 4cm pieces and place in a large bowl. Using a pestle and mortar, grind the saffron to a fine powder then tip into a small bowl. Finely grate the zest from the lemon into the bowl and add the paprika, garlic, yogurt and extra virgin olive oil. Season generously with salt and pepper and whisk to combine. Keep the zested lemon.

Add the chicken pieces to the bowl and mix to coat. Cover the bowl and place in the fridge to marinate for 2 hours.

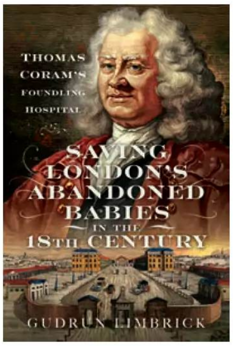
For the garlic yogurt, mix all the ingredients together in a bowl until smoothly combined. Transfer to a serving bowl, cover and refrigerate until needed.

When you're ready to cook, quarter the zested lemon and cut each quarter into thin slices. Thread the chicken pieces and lemon slices alternately onto 6 long metal skewers.

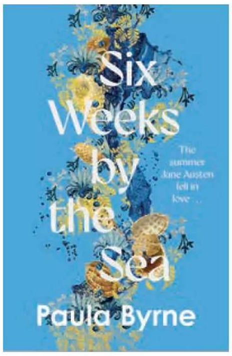
Place the chicken skewers on the barbecue and cook for around 4–5 minutes on each side, turning them regularly.

Place the chicken kebabs on a serving platter and serve, with the garlic yogurt alongside. B

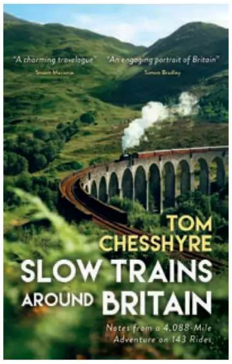
BOOKS


THOMAS CORAM'S FOUNDLING HOSPITAL
SAVING LONDON'S ABANDONED BABIES IN THE 18TH CENTURY
GUDRUN LIMBRICK

Saving London's Abandoned Babies in the 18th Century by Gudrun Limbrick (Pen and Sword, £29.99). The fascinating story of Thomas Coram, a humble ship-builder from Lyme, who founded England's first institution for abandoned babies.


Six Weeks by the Sea
The summer Jane Austen fell in love . . .
Paula Byrne

Six Weeks by the Sea by Paula Byrne (William Collins, £16.99). This historical romance tells the story of how Jane Austen, known for her finely observed romantic tales, fell in love for the first time.


"A charming travelogue"
"An engaging portrait of Britain"
TOM CHESSHYRE
SLOW TRAINS AROUND BRITAIN
Notes from a 4,088-Mile Adventure on 143 Rides

Slow Trains around Britain by Tom Chesshyre (Summersdale, £20). Travel writer and self-confessed 'train nut' Chesshyre celebrates 200 years of passenger railways on a zigzagging tour around Britain.

PHOTO: © CRISTIAN BARNETT

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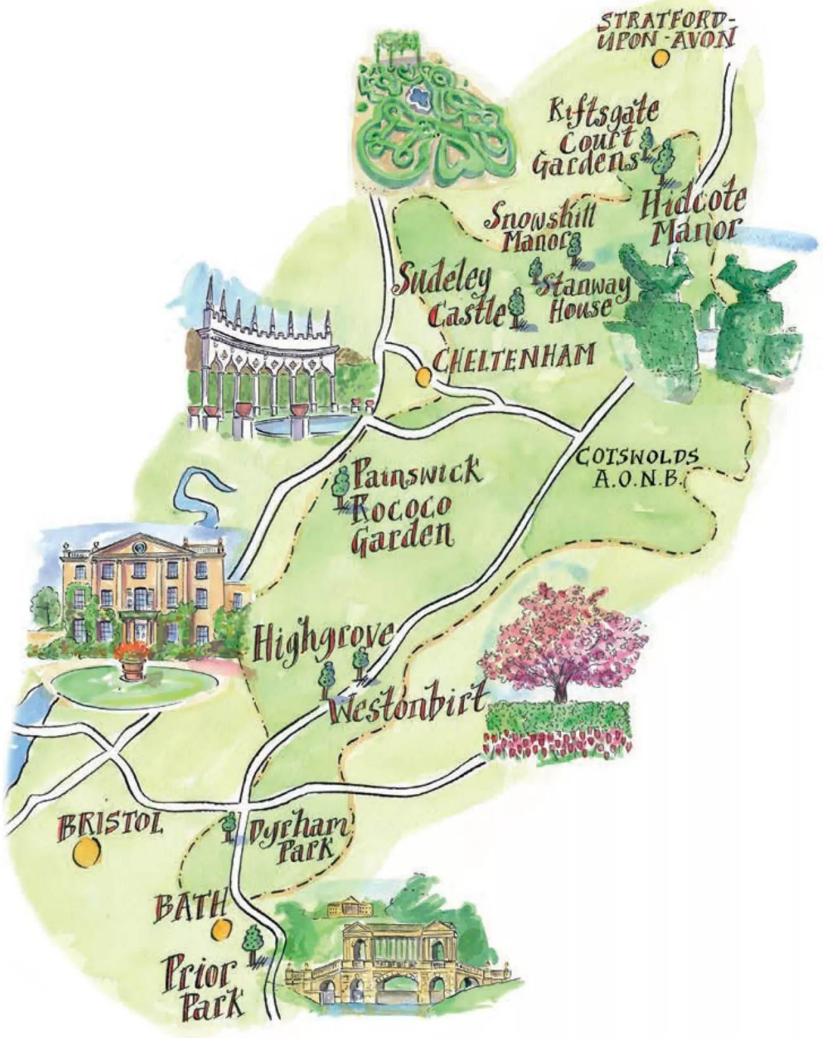
Green & pleasant

From manor-house gardens to a royal country estate, the Cotswolds is blessed with an abundance of beautiful gardens. Here's our pick of the best for a picturesque tour

WORDS **NEIL JONES**


STRATFORD-UPON-AVON
Kiftsgate Court Gardens
Hidcote Manor
Snowshill Manor
Sudeley Castle
Stanway House
CHELTENHAM
COTSWOLDS A.O.N.B.
Painswick Rococo Garden
Highgrove
Westonbirt
BRISTOL
Dyrham Park
BATH
Prior Park

Winding along the twisting, leafy-green lanes of the north Cotswolds countryside near Chipping Campden, you come to a wonderful surprise at Hidcote Manor – or rather, lots of surprises.

Enter the courtyard, pick up a map and you can wander a maze of pathways through more than 10 acres of 'outdoor rooms', each so different and intimate that you feel you have strayed into a series of private havens: the tiny White Garden, alive with curious topiary birds; the Red Border, sweltering with summer dahlias and salvias below redbrick gazebos; the Stilt Garden of hornbeams leading to Heaven's Gate, with its views stretching down through the valley. Box hedges hide the Bathing Pool Garden with its burbling fountain, and the grassy Long Walk drifts to the horizon.

Acclaimed as one of England's most influential 20th-century gardens, Hidcote was gifted to the National Trust in 1948 as its first garden-only property, having been created by 'quiet American' turned British citizen Major Lawrence Johnston: a soldier, watercolourist, ▶

Previous pages, left to right: **Whimsical details at Painswick Rococo Garden; a picturesque path at Hidcote Manor**
Opposite: **Sudeley Castle's historic grandeur**

ILLUSTRATION: © MICHAEL A HILL. PHOTO: © PIPPA MACKENZIE PHOTOGRAPHY

plant hunter and gardener. Living here from 1907 and channelling the Arts and Crafts ethos, Johnston transformed existing farmland by designing his 'garden rooms' – more formal closer to the house, more natural further away – along two axes or 'corridors': an invitation to extend carefree living outdoors that has been much copied or adapted elsewhere.

The Cotswolds is blessed with an amazing diversity of era- and style-spanning gardens that make for rich seasonal tours. Within just half a mile of Hidcote, Kiftsgate Court Gardens boasts an eponymous rose that is said to be England's largest, cascading like a white waterfall over three trees. Then head south – past the Arts and Crafts garden of Snowshill Manor, and Stanway House where the world's tallest gravity fountain shoots over 300ft into the air – to step back in time at Sudeley Castle at Winchcombe.

Ralph Boteler, created Baron Sudeley by King Henry VI, built the castle in the mid-15th century, at a time when gardens prominently featured edible and medicinal plants. But after the castle was 'slighted' in the English Civil War everything ran wild for two centuries until new Victorian owners, with wealth to spare from their glove-making business, began the process of restoration. The formidable chatelaine Emma Dent, in particular, did a great deal to enhance the gardens.

Painswick Rococo Garden delights with serpentine paths, eye-catching follies and water features squeezed into a hidden valley

Present-day chatelaine Elizabeth, Lady Ashcombe and her family continue restorations and re-imaginings, including herb and physic gardens, and a Ruins Garden that embraces the slighted 15th-century Banqueting Hall – an atmospheric backdrop for open-air theatre performances such as Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, which will be held here this summer on 10 August.

The centrepiece of Sudeley's 10 beautiful gardens is the Queens' Garden, named for the four English queens associated with the castle – Anne Boleyn, Katherine Parr, Lady Jane Grey and Elizabeth I. Laid out on the site of the original Tudor parterre and flanked by Emma Dent's magnificent double yew hedges, it's fragrant with the scent of more than 80 varieties of gorgeous roses. Also evoking royalty, the Knot Garden features 1,200 box plants and takes its design from a dress worn by Elizabeth I in one of the castle's paintings, *An Allegory of the Tudor Succession* by Lucas de Heere.

Painswick Rococo Garden, 40 minutes' drive further south, delights with serpentine paths, eye-catching follies and water features squeezed into a hidden valley: another wonderful setting for outdoor events, such as *A Magical Evening of Opera*, this August 1 – bring a rug and picnic!

A fanciful playground designed in the 1740s for wealthy landowner Benjamin Hyett as a place to ▶

PHOTOS: © GAP PHOTOS/HIGHGROVE/A BUTLER/NATIONAL TRUST IMAGES/DAWN BIGGS

Clockwise from left: **Resplendent springtime flowers at Highgrove; whimsy abounds at Painswick Rococo Garden; the Palladian Bridge, Prior Park** entertain guests at his Painswick House, the garden made a flamboyant rococo setting for fashionable Georgian parties. As tastes moved on, however, the pleasure ground became overgrown and forgotten – until the 1980s when the then owners of Painswick House were inspired by Thomas Robins' painting of the garden, commissioned by Hyett in 1748, to begin reviving its rococo glories. Today owned by a Trust, Painswick is the country's sole surviving complete rococo garden, its spirit of fun still apparent as you explore paths to the Red House, Eagle House and Exedra. Visit in January or February for the breathtaking sight of some five million snowdrops bursting onto the scene.

Travelling on south we pass several fine parks – Woodchester, Newark and Dyrham – to arrive at Prior Park Landscape Garden, set in a sweeping valley above the World Heritage City of Bath. Prior Park and its mansion (now a school) were built in the mid-18th century for local entrepreneur Ralph Allen, with advice from the famed poet-cum-gardener Alexander Pope (and possibly also some input from 'Capability' Brown) accounting for the garden's in-vogue 'natural' landscape style. It's a wonderful escape for rambles, and to see the Serpentine Lake in the Wilderness and the three lakes in the lower garden. The much-photographed Palladian Bridge (1755) is one of just four such bridges in the world, and the only one also to act as a dam.

Heading northeast, we next curve towards Tetbury where Westonbirt, The National Arboretum, rooted in the exciting era of Victorian plant hunters, offers spectacular colour throughout the year, particularly in autumn. But our finale is at nearby Highgrove Gardens, at the private residence of King Charles and Queen Camilla. The house is off-limits but the spectacular gardens, created under Charles' direction over the past 40 years, are open to the public on pre-booked tours and walks between April and October.

Designed to "please the eye and sit in harmony with nature", the 15 acres of interlinked gardens are managed organically with sustainability in mind, in keeping with the King's environmentally friendly ethos. Each garden is a window onto personal royal interests and passions: the fragrant Thyme Walk, featuring some 20 varieties of thyme and lined by golden yews clipped into idiosyncratic shapes; the Sundial Garden, channelling a quintessential country-house aesthetic; the colourful, unstructured, species-rich Wildflower Meadow.

A five-year-old Prince William gave each plant a ration of fertiliser when Highgrove's Cottage Garden was first laid out in the spring of 1988, and you can still see the urn where a toddling Prince Harry found a hiding place. Magnolias are the King's favourite in the Arboretum, and he waxes lyrical about summer crops of rare purple carrots, strawberries, raspberries and gooseberries in the walled Kitchen Garden. The produce grown here supplies the royal household as well as seasonal menus in the Orchard Room restaurant – the perfect place to round off your tour of glorious Cotswold gardens.

At King Charles and Queen Camilla's country residence, Highgrove, each garden is a window onto personal royal interests and passions

THE PLANNER

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GETTING THERE & AROUND

Regular rail services run between London Paddington and the market town of Moreton-in-Marsh (north Cotswolds) and Bradford-on-Avon and Bath Spa (south), but a car is necessary for exploring widely.

Cotswold Garden Tours offers guided itineraries around an eclectic range of gardens (2, 3 and 5 days), and Cotswold Tours & Travel also offers 1- to 5-day garden-themed tours. Cotswold Walks' 3- and 6-day garden tours include optional short walks in the wider landscape. *thetrainline.com; cotswoldgardentours.com; cotswoldtoursandtravel.com; cotswoldwalks.com*

WHERE TO STAY

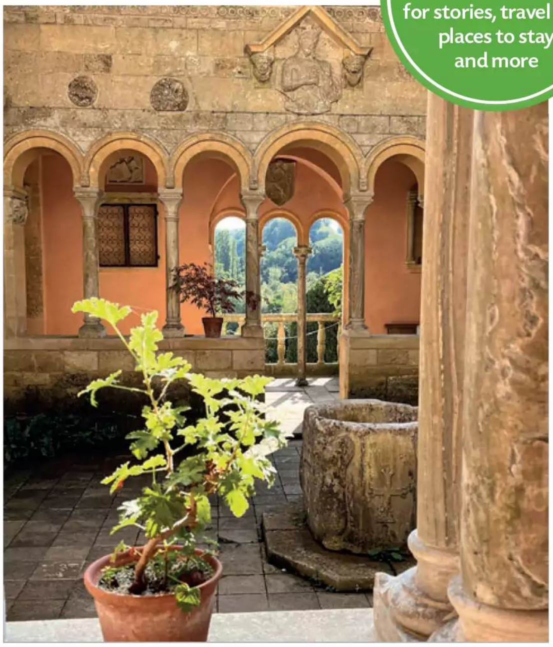
The Pig – In the Cotswolds, in the village of Barnsley, has a range of snug, elegant and 'Wow-wee' bedrooms overlooking Arts and Crafts-style gardens created by the late Rosemary Verey (who also gave a helping hand at Highgrove). The Kitchen Garden provides ingredients for menus that are so fresh they can change twice daily. *thepighotel.com/in-the-cotswolds*

WHERE TO EAT & DRINK

Enjoy a snack of sourdough pastries in the café, or maybe wood-roasted estate lamb in the restaurant, at Iford Manor near Bradford-on-Avon. You can also book a tour of the estate's romantic gardens (*right*), restored and developed in modern times, 100 years after Harold Peto's original plantings. *ifordmanor.co.uk*

FURTHER INFORMATION

For ideas on other Cotswolds gardens to visit, see *cotswolds.com*



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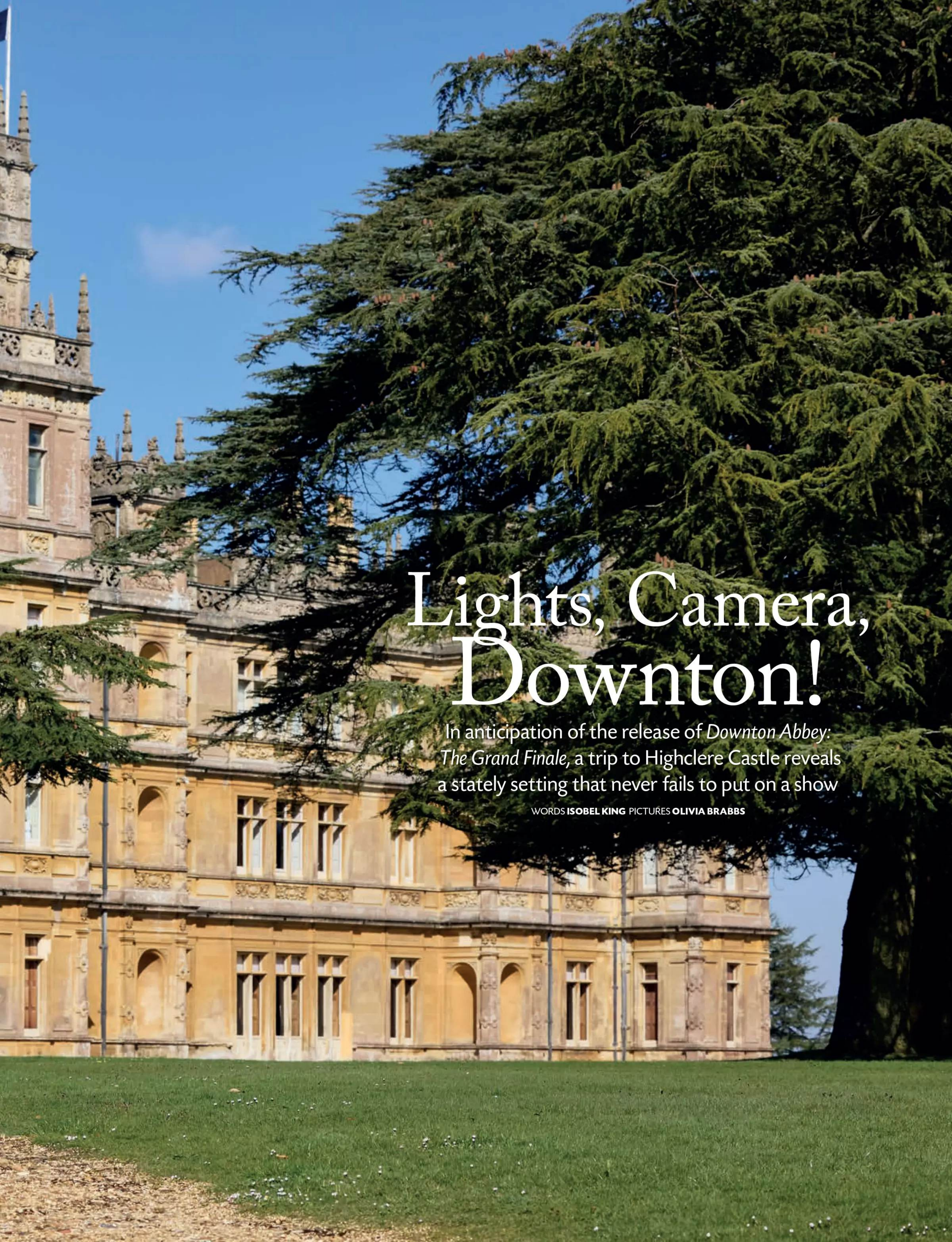

Lights, Camera, Downton!

In anticipation of the release of *Downton Abbey: The Grand Finale*, a trip to Highclere Castle reveals a stately setting that never fails to put on a show

WORDS **ISOBEL KING** PICTURES **OLIVIA BRABBS**

“Those who love the film can also explore the house, with that lovely muddle between reality and fiction, and feel partly on set”

It appears as if out of nowhere. Suddenly, amid tremendous trees and rolling sweeps of green, there it is: Highclere Castle – gothic revival turrets and pinnacles soaring to the sky, honey-coloured Bath stone resplendent against the blue.

Located near Newbury in Berkshire, Highclere is recognisable to many of us as the setting for Julian Fellowes’ global sensation *Downton Abbey*. There has been a film crew here on and off for 15 years, creating the television series and films – most recently for what is billed as the third and final *Downton* film, *A Grand Finale* (due out for release on 12 September). Set in the 1920s, the drama follows the lives of the aristocratic residents of Downton Abbey, the Crawley family, and their retinue of loyal staff.

Champagne flows, costumes dazzle, jewels glimmer, and a picture is painted of a gilded existence, with the contrast of life below stairs brought into sharp focus. Fellowes presents not only the aristocracy and the working class, but also the complexities of the characters that belong to these worlds: “I think that was very clever of Julian,” observes Lady Carnarvon, current custodian of Highclere alongside her husband George Herbert, 8th Earl of Carnarvon.

Downton fans will already be familiar with Highclere’s allure. We’ve seen the Crawley family gather in the Saloon, the heart of the house, rich with splendid decorations such as the rare 17th-century gilt leather wall hangings. The stunning gallery above features Belgian tapestries and the heraldic shields of the Herbert family, crowned by a 50-foot-high vaulted roof. “Those who love the film can also explore the house, with that lovely muddle between reality and fiction, and feel partly on set. There’s something about the magic of the movies, and I think there’s something about the magic of Highclere that’s worked,” says Lady Carnarvon.

Just like Michelle Dockery, for instance, playing Lady Mary on her wedding day, we can descend the grand oak staircase, following in the footsteps of past visitors to Highclere, including King George V and Queen Mary, and prime ministers Benjamin Disraeli and Lord Salisbury. Messrs Cox & Son of London took nearly a year to carve and install the staircase between 1861 and 1862.

The inimitable Dame Maggie Smith’s character, Lady Violet, often displays her acerbic wit in the Drawing Room, notable for its portraits by William ▶

Previous pages: **Lady Carnarvon in the Highclere grounds**
Above: **In Highclere’s Library**
Right: **The Saloon, the heart of the house**

PHOTOS: © OLIVIA BRABBS PHOTOGRAPHY

Clockwise from top: **Napoleon's writing desk and chair in the Music Room; the Dining Room; the Library; a still from *Downton Abbey: A New Era* (2022)**

Beechey (1753–1839) who was, at the time, as famous as Gainsborough or Reynolds. "Can I tempt you to one of these new cocktails?" asks a hopeful Lord Grantham (Hugh Bonneville). "No, I don't think so. They look too exciting for so early in the evening," comes Lady Violet's swift put-down. "I think Maggie Smith certainly showed us all how to live," laughs Lady Carnarvon.

While Downton Abbey provides the title for the drama, at every turn it is Highclere that leads the action. "I mean, to build this as a set; well A, you couldn't, and B, if you did you would have used up all your budget on one room," says Fellowes in *The Making of Downton Abbey*. The paintings, the furniture: "they're not covered up," adds Thomas Howes, who plays second footman, William Mason. "All it takes is a stray can of Coke going up the wall and that's the budget gone!"

As in many other British country houses, the attics and the kitchens at Highclere have been put to other uses, so cavernous sets were built at Ealing Studios, London, to shoot scenes below stairs. "We had this routine of a week at Ealing and a week here [Highclere], which actually I think worked pretty well," Fellowes continues.

Of course, Highclere has a history stretching back far further than its *Downton* days. Indeed, the first written records of the boundaries of the estate were set out in AD 749 by the Anglo-Saxon King Cuthred of Wessex, who granted the land to the Bishop of Winchester. Successive Bishops continued to own the estate for some 800 years, including William of Wykeham, one of the most outstanding figures in English history of the Middle Ages. He rebuilt much of the existing Manor of Highclere from 1368.

The house that we see today, however, owes itself to the work of none other than Sir Charles Barry: architectural mastermind behind the Houses of Parliament. Instructed by Henry Herbert, 3rd Earl of Carnarvon, Barry transformed Highclere – which by the 18th century was a classic Georgian mansion – into a Victorian castle. Notable features include the fine hand-carved stonework and intricate pierced parapets, but most significant of all was the great central tower. Barry fought for this from the beginning against the objections of Lord Carnarvon's land agent, who had warned that it presented "the most alarming danger to your Lordship's pocket".

While Barry and the 3rd Earl lived to see the exterior of the north, east and south sides of Highclere completed, neither would see the interior and the west wing (designated as servants' quarters) finished in 1878. Highclere's transformation had taken some 40 years; a long slog, but judging by Barry's letters from the time, the castle was a happier commission for him than the Houses of Parliament.

A tour of Highclere today takes you through the magnificent state rooms and a number of bedrooms, named after Anglo-Saxon kingdoms or members of the royal family; in addition to George V and Queen Mary, the house hosted the late Queen Elizabeth II, godmother to Lord Carnarvon. Guides in each room bring the history of Highclere to life, such as in the Smoking Room where the 5th Earl once discussed plans with fellow Egyptologist, Howard Carter. Their partnership famously led to the discovery of the Tomb of Tutankhamun; an exhibition in Highclere's basement tells the story.

What is it like to live in the 'real' Downton Abbey? "I think on our social media people can see, I hope, that we are kind, down-to-earth people … We are ▶

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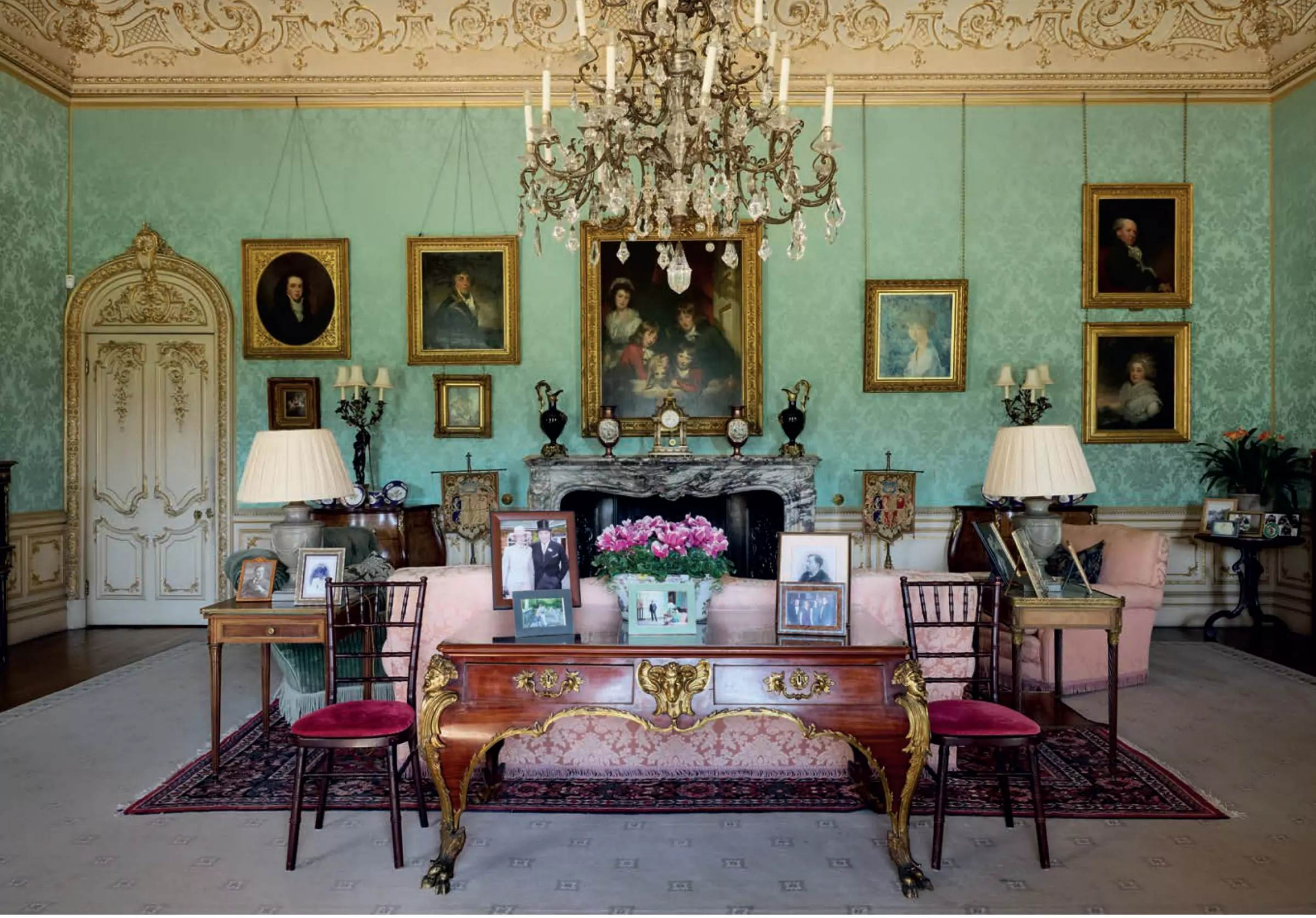

> **"Highclere is the people within it, it is the cameraderie, the pulling together, the being there for the down times and celebrating the up times"**

just a hardworking family – I'm quite a good barista, making cups of coffee! We do everything, we're both farming, gardening … it's all hands to the tiller," reveals Lady Carnarvon, who emphasises that the smooth running of the house is down to teamwork and community. "Highclere for me is the people who work with me here, who are there when the alarms go off in the middle of the night … It's the people within it, it is the camaraderie, the pulling together, the being there for the down times and celebrating the up times. And the people coming to visit us here, too."

"The trees and the nature are truly as important as the house," she adds, a keen gardener herself. Highclere's spectacular parkland, dotted with follies, is the work of famed landscape gardener Lancelot 'Capability' Brown, of whom there stands a statue in the grounds. Violet Crawley may have once called gardening a "desperate" pursuit, but Highclere's gardens are glorious, including a walled garden, a secluded 'Secret Garden' and a wildflower meadow. "I hope it's a healing place to be," says Lady Carnarvon.

If this is to be the last chapter for *Downton*, it certainly won't be for Highclere. Bound up in the arcadian landscape, it has a timeless drama and romance all of its own. "I love it when people are lying on the lawns looking up at the sky, watching the clouds go by, or eating a scone, deciding whether to put cream or jam first," Lady Carnarvon smiles. "At the moment it's a very challenging world, so I hope the fact that we're still here acts as an anchor in people's lives." B

A YEAR AT HIGHCLERE

Lady Carnarvon's new book *A Year at Highclere: Secrets and Stories from the Real Downton Abbey* (published by Century in September; £22) will reveal what it's like to live and work in this extraordinary home. Expect humorous anecdotes on living with the *Downton* film crew, revelations about Highclere's flamboyant 1920s parties, ghost stories, gardening tips – and Lady Carnarvon's musings on having a few too many dogs... *highclerecastle.co.uk*

Above: **The Rococo Revival Drawing Room, decorated by Almina, 5th Countess of Carnarvon**

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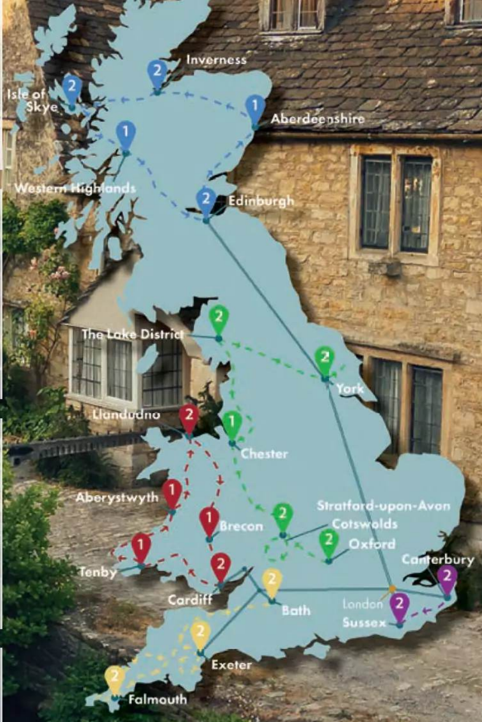
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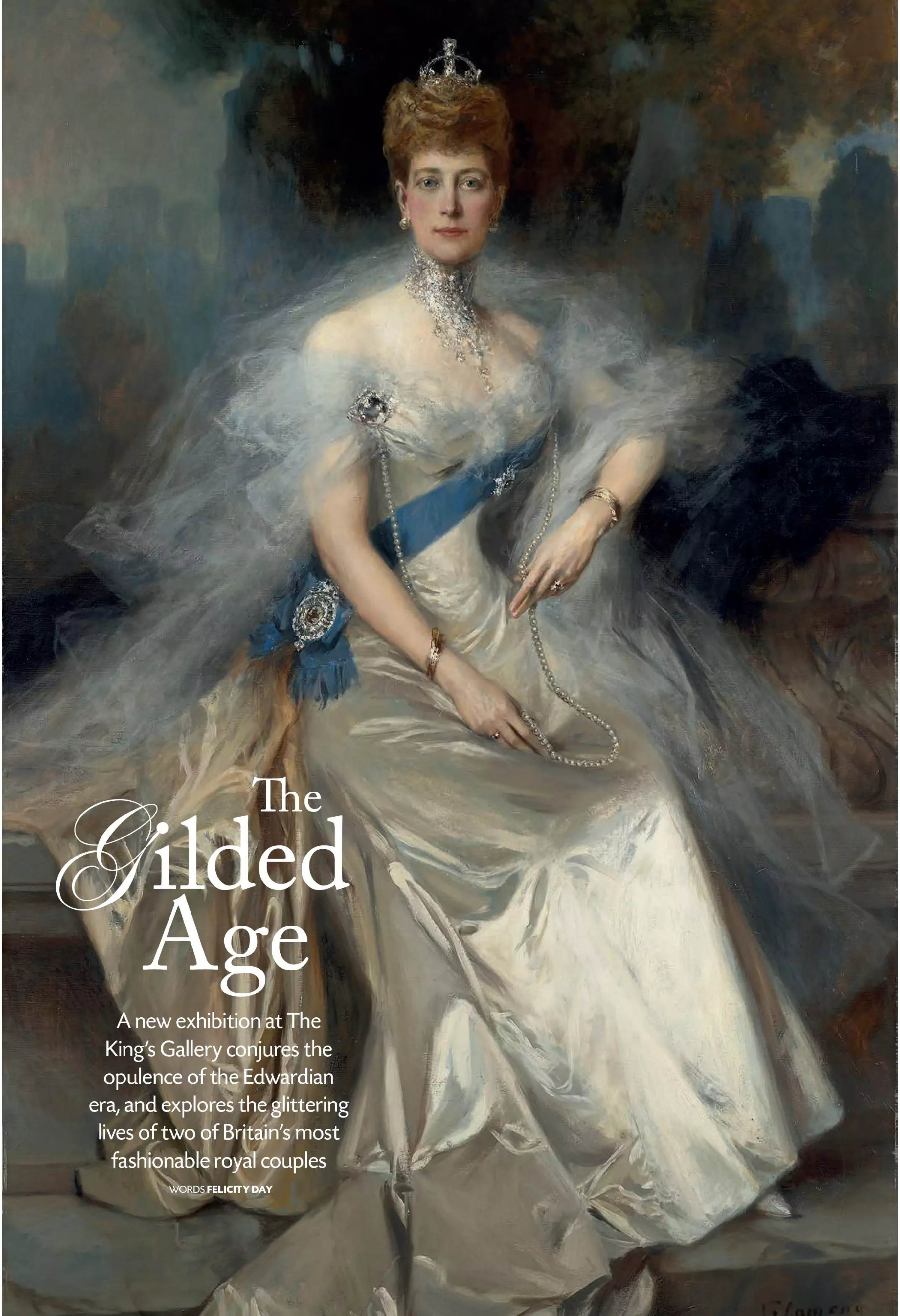


The Gilded Age

A new exhibition at The King's Gallery conjures the opulence of the Edwardian era, and explores the glittering lives of two of Britain's most fashionable royal couples

WORDS **FELICITY DAY**

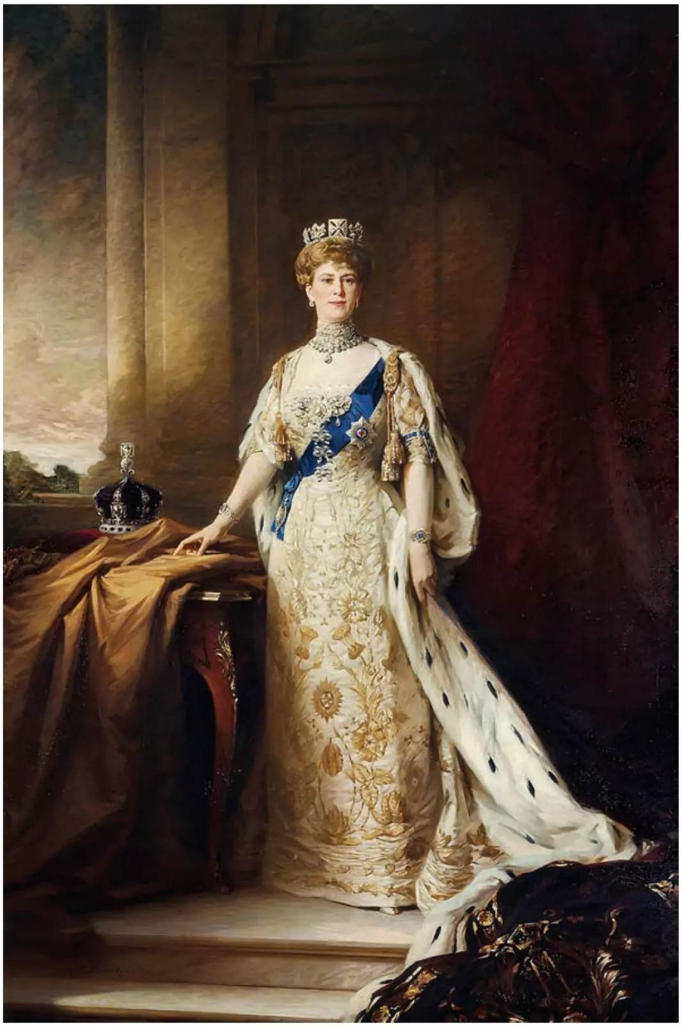
PHOTO: © ROYAL COLLECTION ENTERPRISES LIMITED 2024/ROYAL COLLECTION TRUST

There's a quote attributed to the future King Edward VII around the time that Queen Victoria celebrated the 60th anniversary of her accession to the throne in 1897. "I have no objection whatsoever to the notion of the Eternal Father," her rather undutiful son is supposed to have said to the Archbishop of Canterbury, "but every objection to the concept of an eternal mother."

Edward, born to Victoria and Albert in 1841, had spent most of his life as heir apparent. It was only in 1901, at the age of 59, that he at last got to wear the crown. Already in ill-health by that point, his was to be a short reign, lasting just nine years. Its brevity is partly the reason why the era to which he gives his name is often overlooked. That, and his reputation as a high-living, party-loving playboy, which makes it all too easy to dismiss the reign of 'Edward the Caresser' as a frivolous interlude in history, squeezed between the great innovations of the Victorian age and the great horrors of the First World War. A time of genteel garden parties on the lawn at Downton Abbey, and children in sailor suits chasing hoops through the park with Mary Poppins.

But, says Kathryn Jones, lead curator of the Royal Collection Trust's first-ever exhibition on the era, *The Edwardians: Age of Elegance*, "this was a period of immense change – politically and culturally. It is seen as a golden age of style and glamour, which indeed it was, but there is so much more to discover beneath the surface."

There's no denying that Edward, his wife of nearly 40 years, Queen Alexandra, and their son, the future King George V and his wife Mary, were intensely glamorous figures, setting the fashion agenda and followed by photographers from around the world. Nor that they lived enviable (and expensive) lives, surrounded by rich and privileged friends and filled with parties and pleasure, from champagne-fuelled dinners and shooting weekends on country estates to yacht racing at Cowes. This much is abundantly clear from the 300 or so treasures gathered in The King's Gallery, with never-before-seen photos ▸



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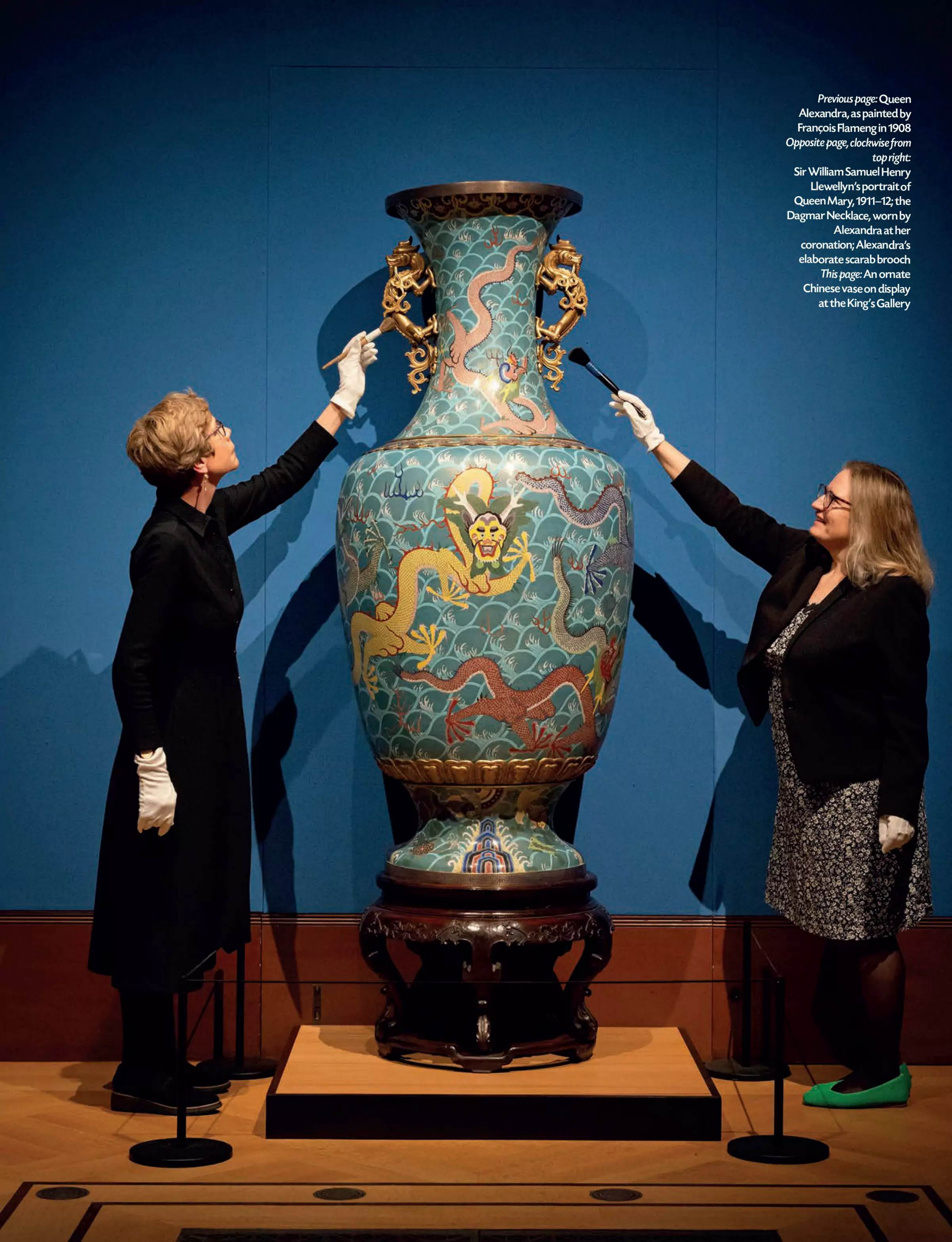
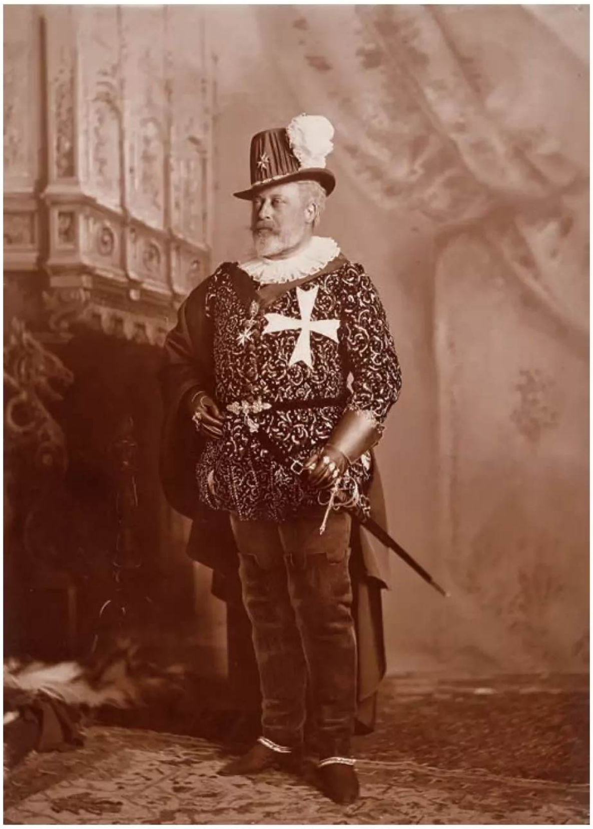
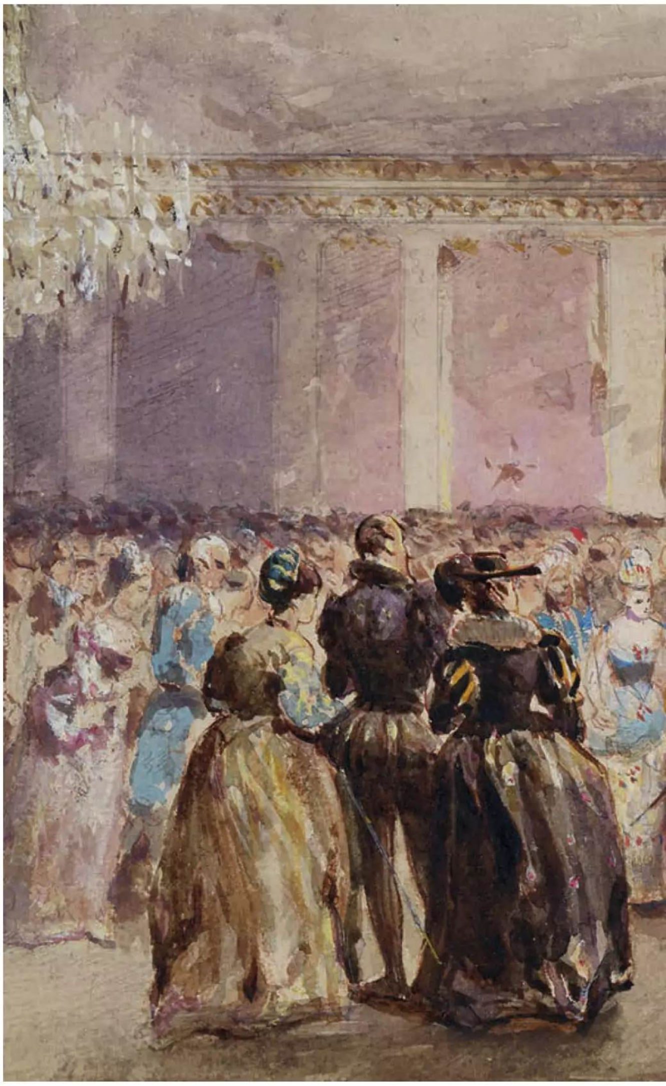


Previous page: Queen Alexandra, as painted by François Flameng in 1908 *Opposite page, clockwise from top right:* Sir William Samuel Henry Llewellyn's portrait of Queen Mary, 1911–12; the Dagmar Necklace, worn by Alexandra at her coronation; Alexandra's elaborate scarab brooch *This page:* An ornate Chinese vase on display at the King's Gallery





> **Despite its reputation as a lazy, sunlit afternoon before the dark chaos of war, the Edwardian era was dynamic and eventful**

showing Edward in fancy dress for a high-society costume ball, an electric-blue cigarette case by luxury Russian firm Fabergé that was a gift from his favourite mistress, and sumptuous swagger portraits by society artists like John Singer Sargent. Yet the assembled riches also reveal that these early-20th-century royals had their finger on the pulse of the dynamic age they were living through, too.

For despite its reputation as a lazy, sunlit afternoon before the dark chaos of war, the Edwardian era was dynamic – a time of exuberant optimism, and far from uneventful. It saw the Wright Brothers make the world's first powered flight, something that, as HG Wells put it, "no-one but a lunatic here and there" thought would be possible even thirty years before. It saw the launch of the (supposedly) 'unsinkable' *Titanic*, and the race to reach the South Pole for the first time. It was the age when motor cars went mainstream (the Model T Ford first rolled off production lines in 1908), and the world began to feel a great deal smaller. In 1901, George and Mary were able to embark on the biggest royal tour in history, charting a 45,000-mile course around the Empire over seven months.

Technology was changing lives: electricity and telephones were spreading into homes, and cinemas into ▶

Clockwise from top left: **Edward dressed as a Grand Prior of the Order of Malta; Godfrey Durand's painting *The Marlborough House fancy ball* (1874); a Fabergé cigarette case; the *Queen of Time* statue on Selfridges' facade; Queen Alexandra when Princess of Wales**

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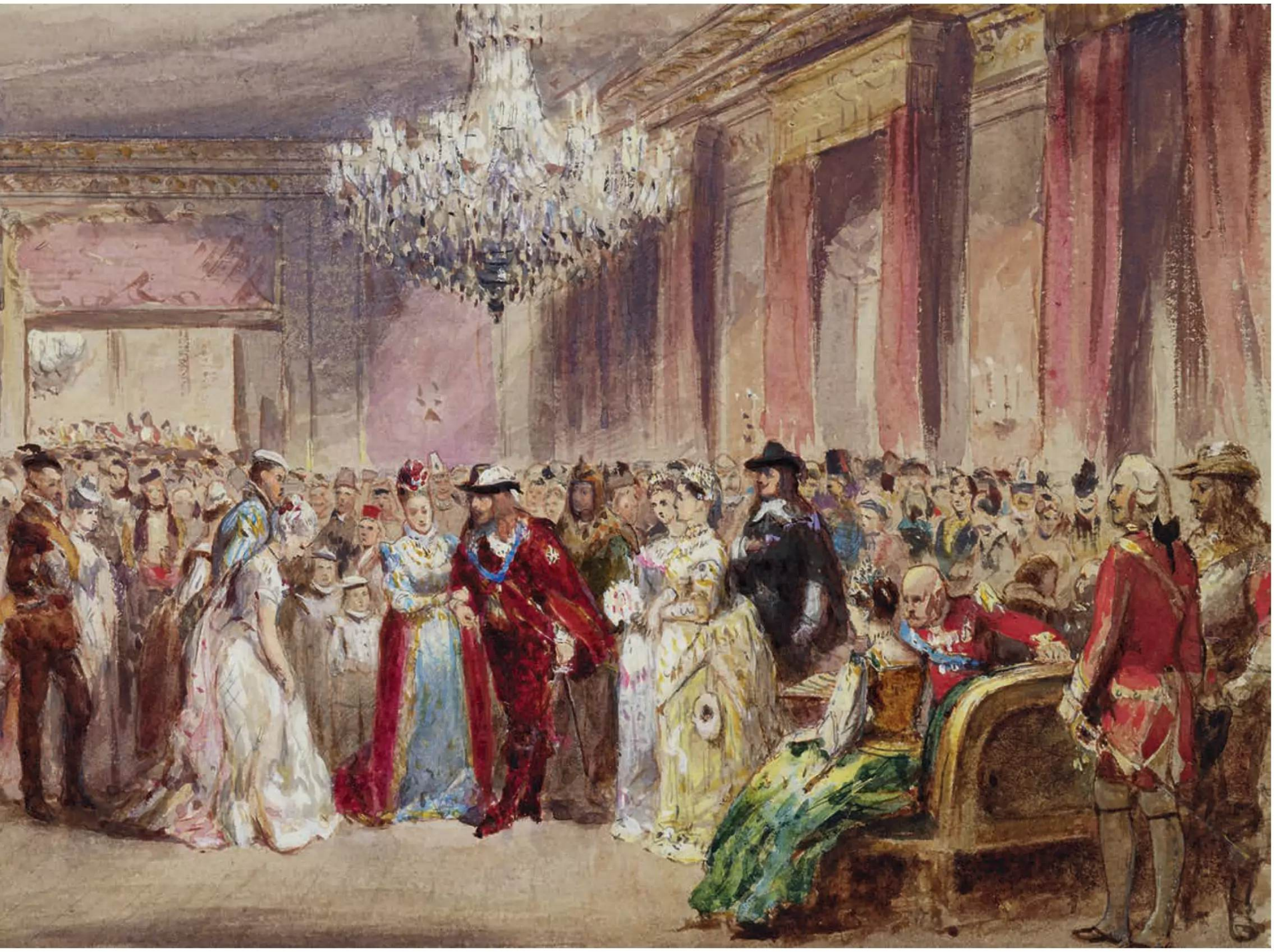

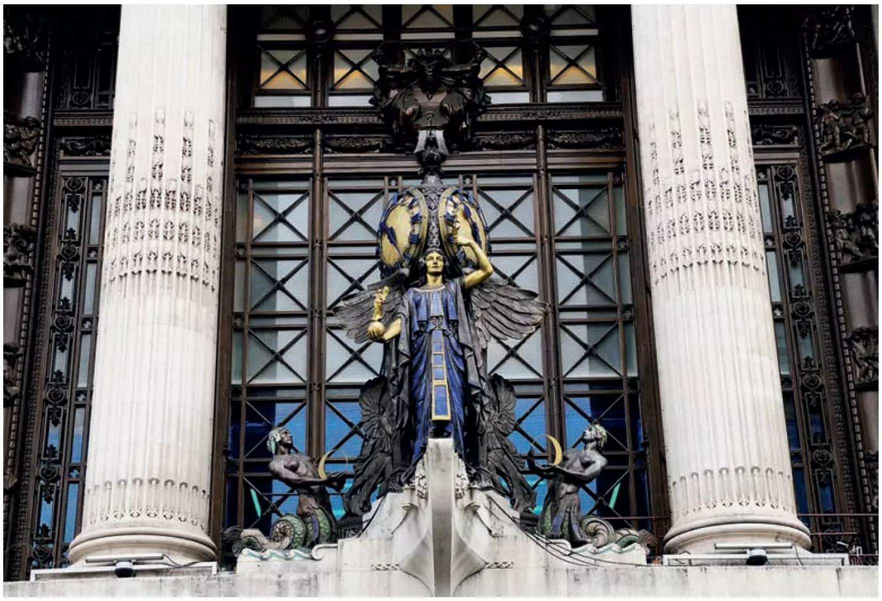

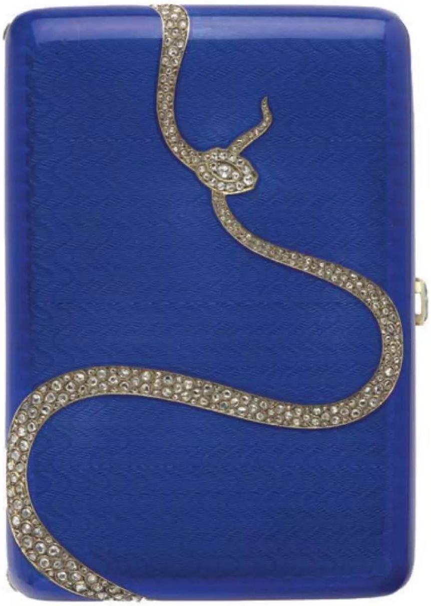

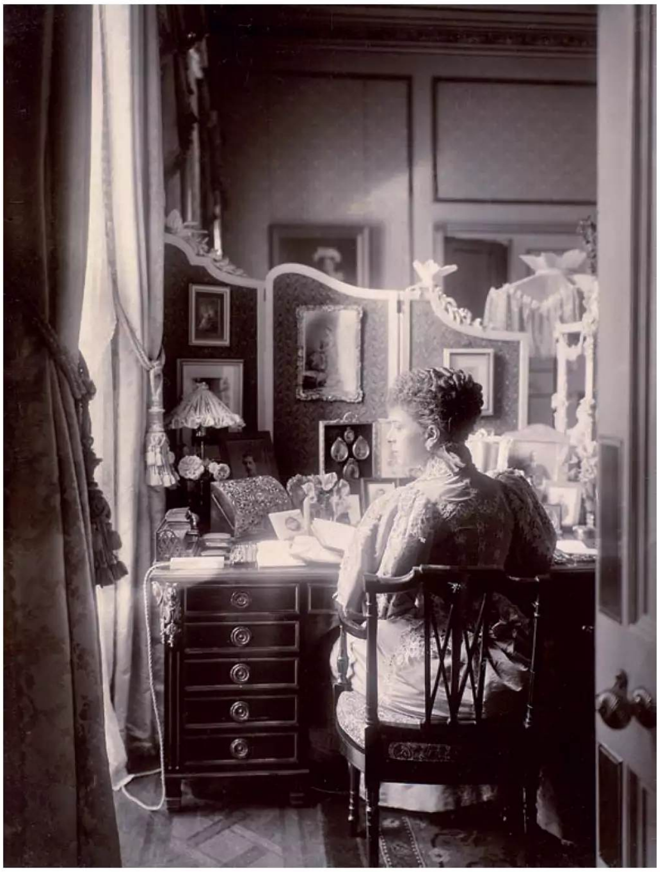

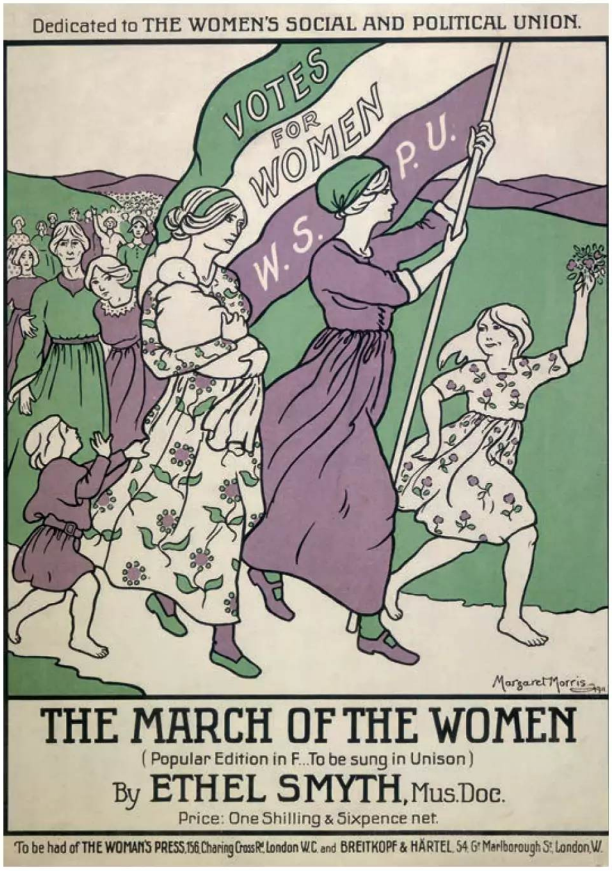

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Above left to right: **Queen Mary, when Duchess of York; a Suffragette song sheet**

towns. In 1910, the first criminal was caught using new wireless telegraphy – Dr Crippen, suspected of murdering his music-hall star wife, was traced to an ocean liner, bound for Canada with his lover.

The sort of social change we usually associate with the period after the Great War was already underway in Edwardian Britain, too. The Labour Party, formed in 1900, was winning its first seats in Parliament, while the Liberal government headed by Prime Minister Herbert Asquith (the first head of government in British history not to own his own country estate) was introducing old-age pensions and free school meals.

Meanwhile, ordinary Britons were rebelling against the established order – in fact, the years between 1911 and 1914 became known as the Great Unrest due to the scale of the industrial strikes. And, of course, the Suffragettes, the members of the Women's Social and Political Union, founded by Emmeline Pankhurst and her daughters in 1903, were using 'deeds not words' to fight for the vote. Starting with protests and petitions, by the 1910s their members were engaged in something very like terrorism: smashing the windows of shops in London's West End, slashing paintings in the National Gallery, setting fire to politicians' homes and planting bombs in places like St Paul's Cathedral.

"There is also great unrest in Europe and beyond," points out Kathryn, "and we find the monarchy adapting and becoming more approachable" – in 1902, for instance, Edward instituted the Order of Merit to recognise not aristocrats but public figures from the military, arts and science. And in a move that still feels strikingly modern, Queen Alexandra, a keen photographer who used a cutting-edge portable camera to snap shots of both official royal events and private family moments, contributed some of her images to a charity book.

The Edwardian royals were also "conscious of their influence" when it came to the arts, says Kathryn, collecting works from female artists, craftspeople from the Empire and fashionable movements like Art Nouveau. While the latter's vogue was only brief, the cultural legacy of the era is a rich one. The Edwardians gave us the patriotic anthem of the Last Night of the Proms, Edward Elgar's *Land of Hope and Glory*, as well as an array of fictional characters still shaping our imaginations today, from Beatrix Potter's Peter Rabbit to Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes.

Not to mention some of our most famous London landmarks: Admiralty Arch at the top of the Mall, which was erected in memory of Queen Victoria; the Ritz hotel, a haunt of King Edward himself; and Selfridges department store on Oxford Street, which ushered a million customers through its doors in its first week of trading in 1909.

It was an age of elegance and decadence, certainly – but so much more besides. B

The Edwardians: Age of Elegance is at The King's Gallery, Buckingham Palace, until 23 November; www.rct.uk

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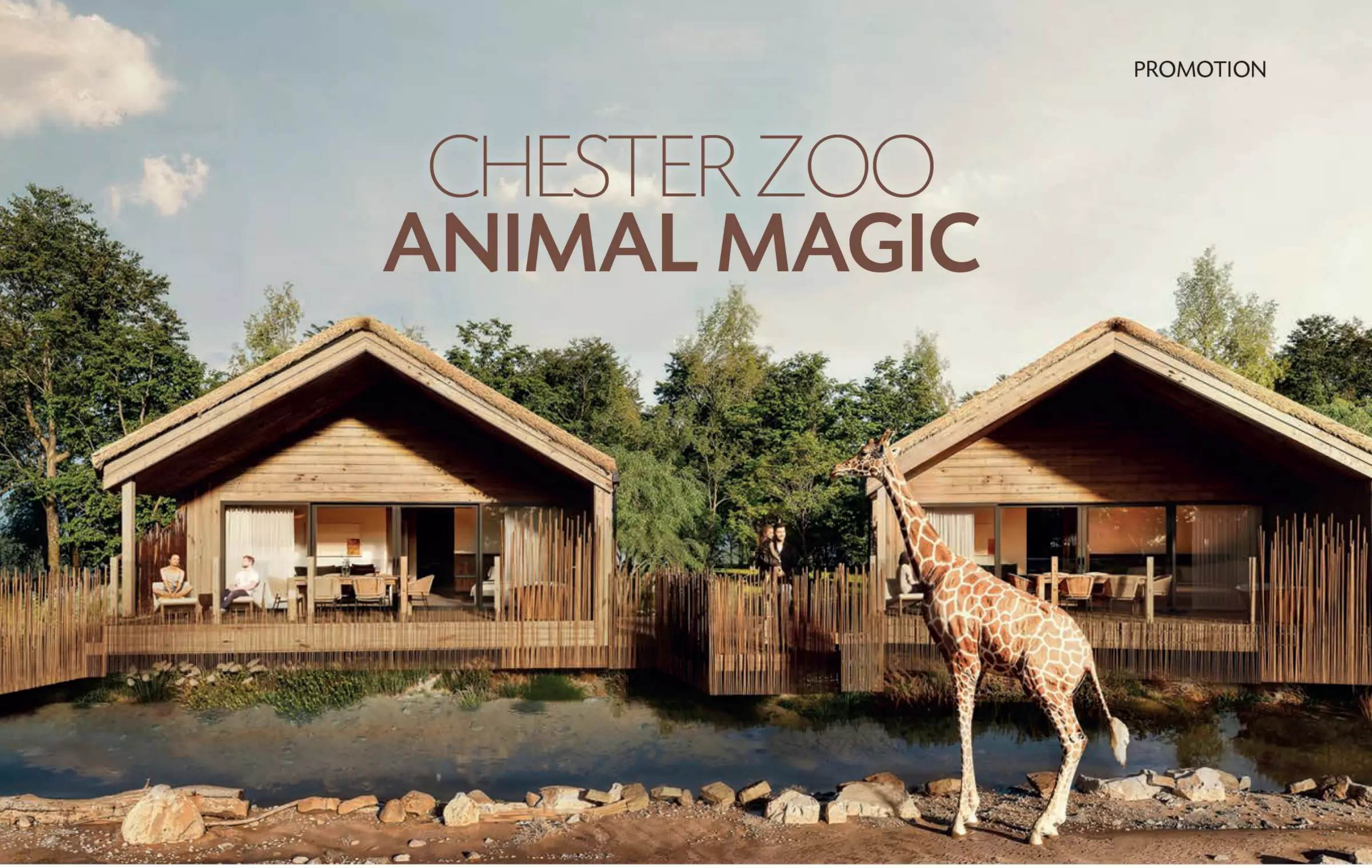

At The Reserve, Chester Zoo's brand-new luxury lodge experience, unforgettable memories and a powerful conservation mission go hand in hand

Opening this August, The Reserve at Chester Zoo is a collection of 51 premium lodges set around a private lake and adjacent to the zoo's new Heart of Africa habitat, with sweeping views across the giraffe paddock. Designed to reflect the textures and tones of the savannah, each lodge is a sanctuary of calm, blending the comforts of home with immersive natural surroundings.

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Every experience is designed to inspire awe and create lasting memories, and every stay helps protect wildlife. As a not-for-profit organisation, Chester Zoo reinvests all profits into conservation. That means your visit supports work in more than 20 countries, from breeding endangered black rhinos to using AI to protect pangolins and giraffes in Uganda.

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RURAL ESCAPES

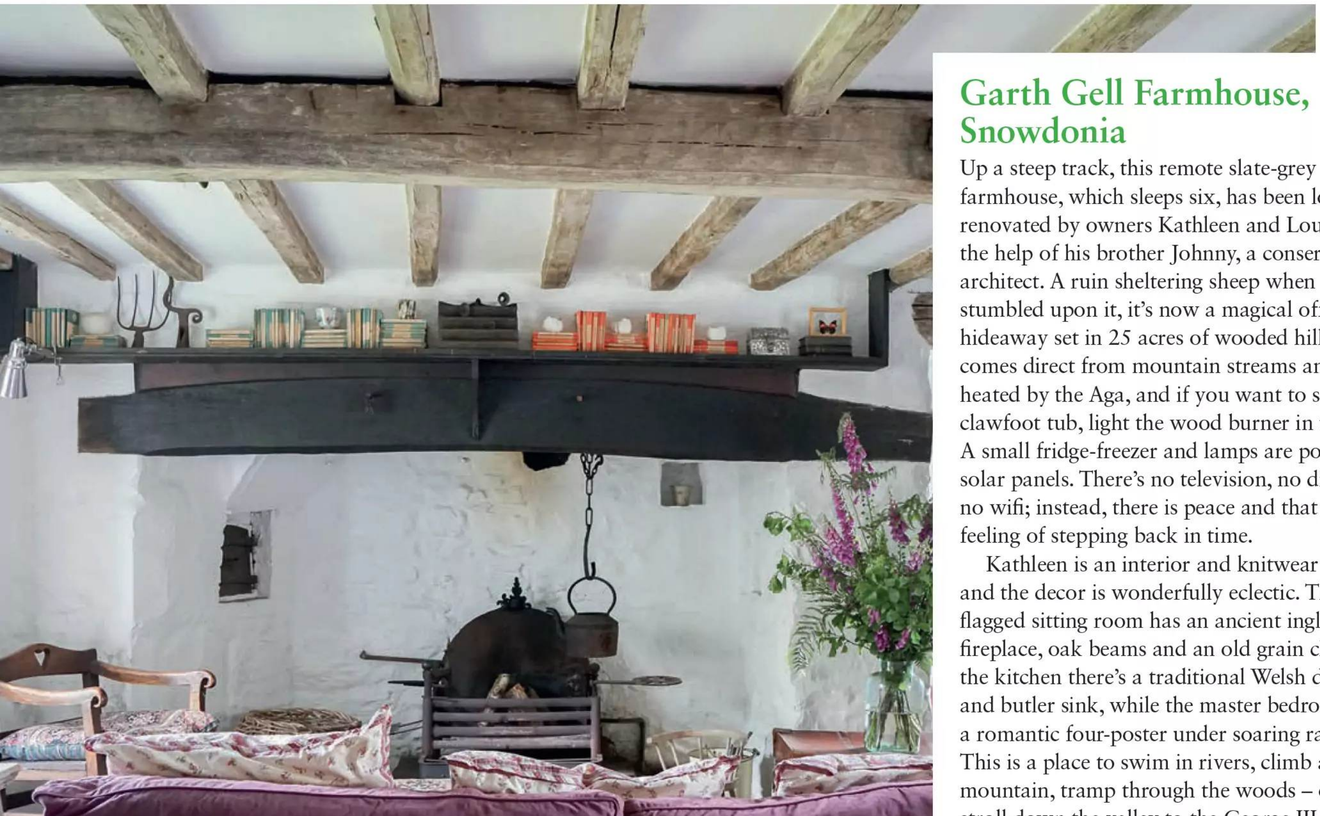
Here are Britain's best cottages for a cosy stay, with thatched roofs, wood beams and quirky charm galore

WORDS **LUCY GILLMORE**

The Tapestry, Lake District

This creeper-clad 17th-century farmhouse oozes character. In the village of Underbarrow in the southern Lakes, it's just a pebble's throw from tourist hotspot Windermere but a world away in terms of tranquillity. The garden opens onto wide-angle views of that quintessential Lakes landscape of field and fell.

Inside, the rooms are a kaleidoscope of colour and pattern. Owners Jeremy and Simon scoured antiques shops and markets on their travels to curate the eclectic interiors. The traditional farmhouse kitchen is open to the rafters, the ancient-beamed sitting room warmed by a cosy wood burner, and there are four beautiful bedrooms, one with an open fireplace. Bathrooms are also opulent, with clawfoot tubs and brightly tiled showers. Thoughtful touches include a luxury hamper of local products and the House Book, full of the owners' personal tips, favourite restaurants and walks. *uniquehomestays.com* ▶



Garth Gell Farmhouse, Snowdonia

Up a steep track, this remote slate-grey farmhouse, which sleeps six, has been lovingly renovated by owners Kathleen and Louie with the help of his brother Johnny, a conservation architect. A ruin sheltering sheep when they first stumbled upon it, it's now a magical off-grid hideaway set in 25 acres of wooded hills. Water comes direct from mountain streams and is heated by the Aga, and if you want to soak in the clawfoot tub, light the wood burner in the snug. A small fridge-freezer and lamps are powered by solar panels. There's no television, no dishwasher, no wifi; instead, there is peace and that rare feeling of stepping back in time.

Kathleen is an interior and knitwear designer and the decor is wonderfully eclectic. The stone-flagged sitting room has an ancient inglenook fireplace, oak beams and an old grain chest. In the kitchen there's a traditional Welsh dresser and butler sink, while the master bedroom has a romantic four-poster under soaring rafters. This is a place to swim in rivers, climb a mountain, tramp through the woods – or simply stroll down the valley to the George III pub. *garthgellfarmhouse.co.uk*

PHOTOS: © KIP HIDEAWAYS/KYM GRIMSHAW PHOTOGRAPHY/JILL TATE

Bishop Lightfoot Cottage, County Durham

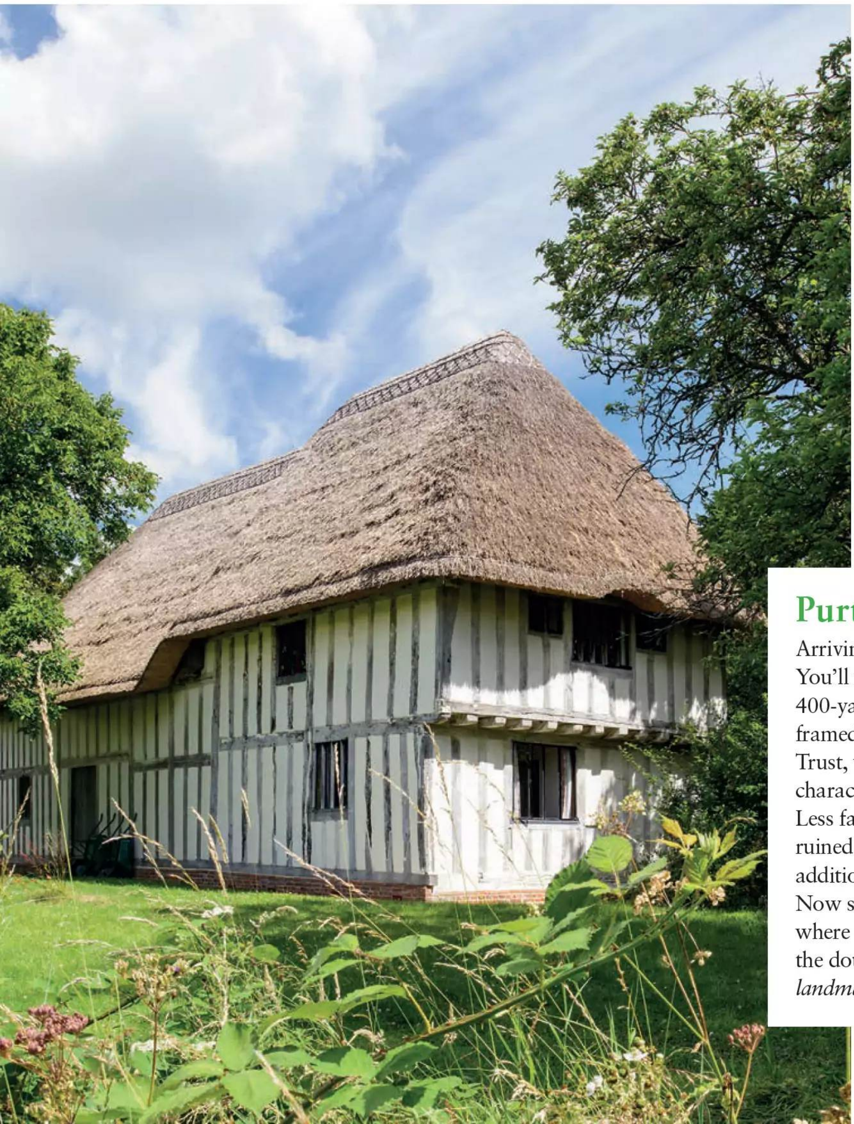
Named after a 19th-century bishop from the market town of Bishop Auckland, this characterful cottage nudges up against the gates of magnificent Auckland Palace, once home to the powerful Prince Bishops of Durham and reopened in 2019 after major conservation work. Originally two cottages, Bishop Lightfoot now sleeps six, and is furnished with antiques, its walls painted in rich heritage colours.

This is one of four cottages recently renovated as part of the Auckland Project, a £70 million scheme aimed at breathing new life into the town. Booking the cottages, you also get a Bishop's Key Pass to the project's eclectic attractions, including galleries dedicated to Spanish art and mining art (the town was once a thriving mining community). After-hours access to Auckland Palace's restored Walled Garden is also included, where in the 1750s the Prince Bishops grew pineapples and other exotics.
crabtreeandcrabtree.com

Cuttieshillock, Aberdeenshire

On a Highland estate on the eastern edge of the Cairngorms National Park, this handsome stone house, once an ancient inn where troops rested during the Jacobite Rebellion, is one of a handful of cottages renovated by owners Charlie and Caroline Gladstone. Most are clustered about four miles away at the main hub, where you'll find The Glen Dye Arms with its roaring fire, and the small shop where you can stock up on their homegrown veg, hens' eggs and more. In the woods here you'll also find the Discovery and Adventure Centre, with activities from bushcraft to axe-throwing.

Cuttieshillock, however, stands alone, looking out over forest-fringed countryside. Sleeping six, the three-bedroom house is decked out in Glen Dye's distinctive vintage-chic style. There's no television, just stacks of books, board games and a record player, plus an artist's studio in the garden along with a wood-fired sauna, hot tub and barbecue for Highland evenings under the stars.
glendyecabinsandcottages.com



Purton Green, Suffolk

Arriving with your belongings in a wheelbarrow is certainly novel. You'll find the wheelbarrow where you leave your car for the last 400-yard tramp across the fields to Purton Green, a medieval timber-framed house dating back to 1250. It was acquired by the Landmark Trust, which restores historic properties and turns them into characterful holiday lets, in 1969, and was one of their first projects. Less fairytale, more history book, the painstaking renovation of the ruined building involved removing a central chimney stack, a later addition, and converting a 17th-century section into living quarters. Now sleeping four in one double and one twin, this is a house where history seeps out of the walls. Dining at the trestle table in the double-height 13th-century hall is an unforgettable experience.
landmarktrust.org.uk

▶

Spring Water Cottage, Wiltshire

Doorways are low, stairs steep and floors wonderfully wonky in this fairytale thatched cottage in the Wiltshire countryside, with a cheery apple-green door and walled garden. Inside, the duck egg blue country kitchen has stacks of cookery books to pore over, the bathroom boasts a red clawfoot tub, the bedrooms colourful quilts, and the cosy sitting room has a wood burner flanked by china dogs and old-fashioned bellows, shelves crammed with yet more books.

Originally two cottages, it's all nooks and crannies and higgledy-piggledy charm, and can sleep up to six, or eight in the summer when there's an extra bedroom in a garden annexe. Play croquet on the lawn, pick apples, pears and plums from the orchard, raid the greenhouse for vegetables and herbs, and picnic in the sun.
kiphideaways.com

PHOTO: © TANYA ARYA PHOTOGRAPHY

Park Cottage, Derbyshire

This 17th-century beauty is the very definition of a 'chocolate-box cottage', with its thatched roof, exposed beams and walled garden. In the village of Baslow on the edge of the Chatsworth Estate, the cottage has been beautifully refurbished by the Duchess of Devonshire. Inside, the two-bedroom cottage is largely traditional, with one eye-catching exception. The master bedroom in the eaves boasts a bespoke artisan bed, the frame resembling a tangle of branches, made from wood from Chatsworth's rhododendrons. Downstairs the rooms are furnished with antiques, including a handsome grandfather clock, and there's a cosy beamed sitting room.

But the main attraction is on the doorstep. Chatsworth, home to the Devonshire family for 17 generations, is one of England's finest stately homes. Tour the house, explore 105 acres of gardens, stock up on local produce in the farm shop or enjoy a craft ale at local pub The Devonshire Arms.
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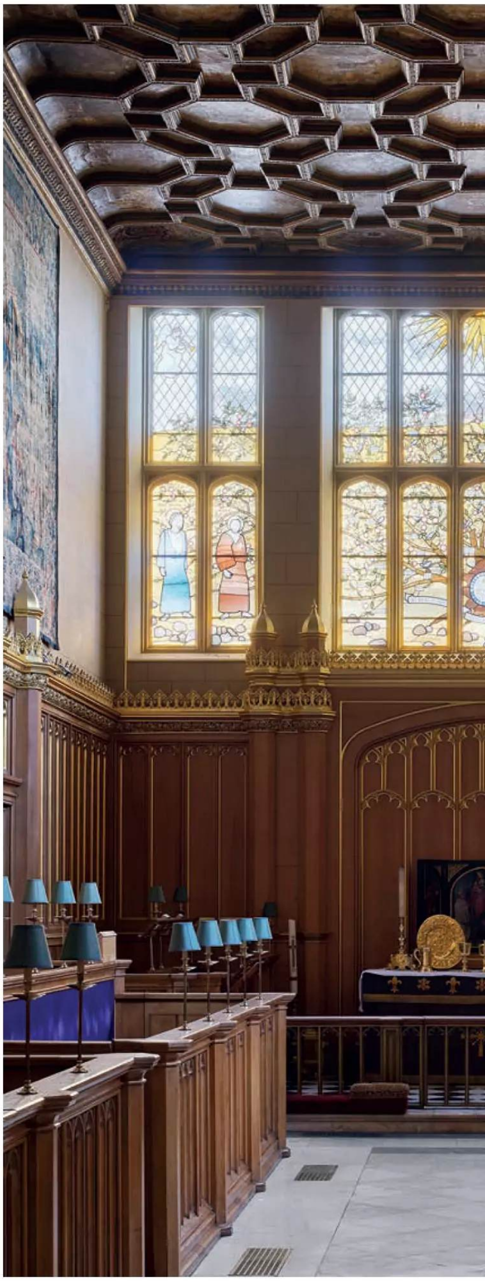
BEHIND PALACE DOORS

Built by Henry VIII, St James's Palace has been the site of some of the most important events in royal history – and has recently opened to the public for the first time. We take a tour of its hallowed halls

WORDS **ROSE SHEPHERD**

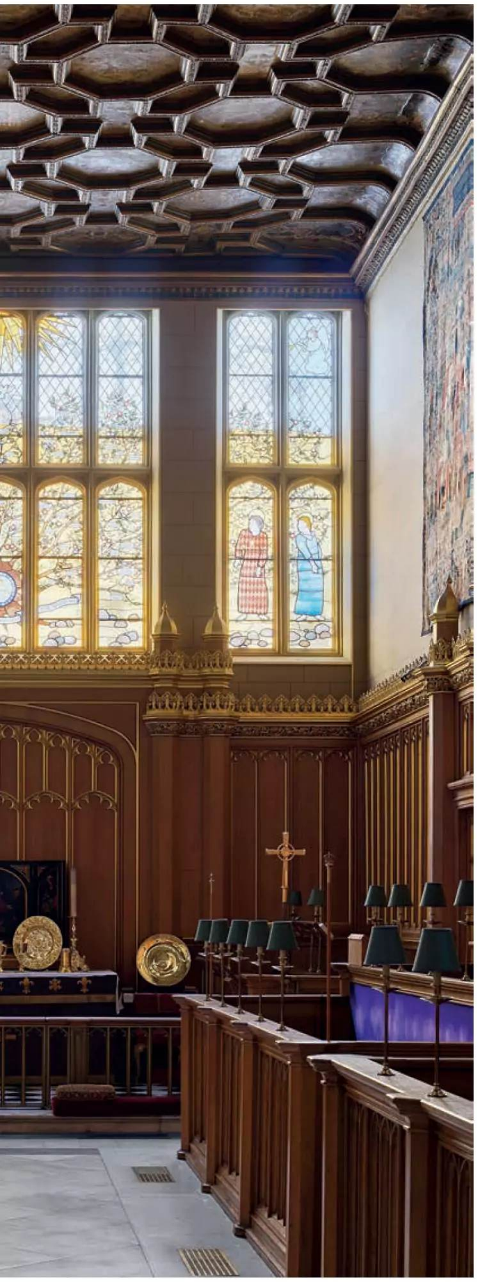


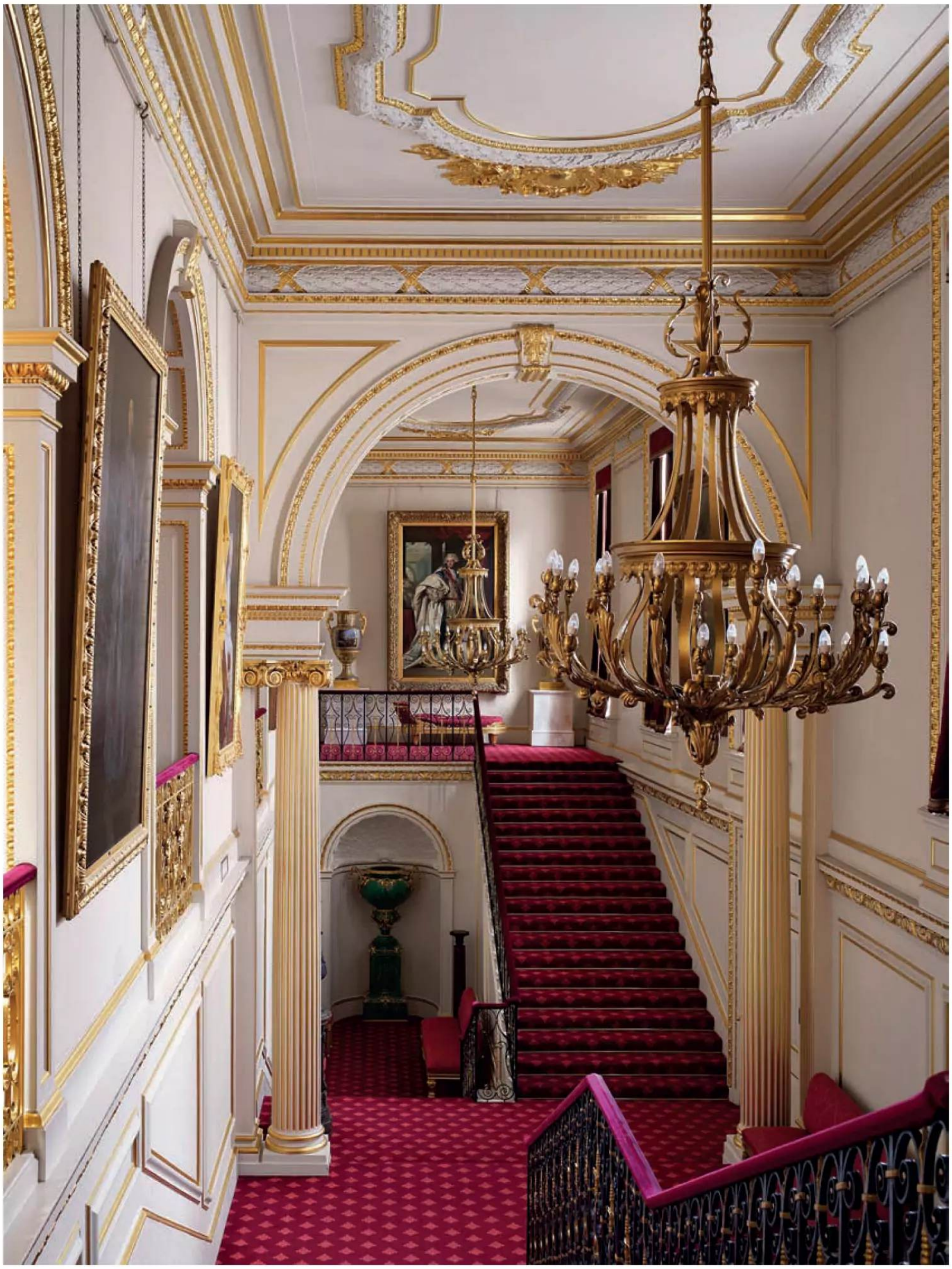
Most visitors to London will instantly recognise Buckingham Palace, one of the world's most iconic buildings. Fewer realise that a far older palace, steeped in history, is just a stroll away from those famous wrought-iron gates. Even some Londoners are unaware that the distinctive redbrick building at the west end of Pall Mall is officially the most senior royal palace and the administrative centre of the British monarchy. It was here, on 10 September 2022, that the Garter King of Arms publicly proclaimed the accession of King Charles III.

Once the principal seat of the British monarchy, St James's Palace has for five centuries provided the backdrop to royal events joyful and tragic, hosting the full panoply of state even as it guarded its mystery. But this year it was announced that, on select dates in the spring, this enigmatic edifice and treasure house would be open for guided tours.

"One of the Royal Collection Trust's key charitable aims is to make the royal residences and the Royal Collection as accessible as possible to the public, so we were delighted to be able to open St James's Palace to more visitors this year, following successful trials," a spokesman told me. "Feedback has been very positive, with visitors enjoying learning about the palace's remarkable history."

***Previous pages:* The Colour Court; State trumpeters from the Band of the Household Cavalry at the Proclamation of King Charles III**





Above, from left: **The Throne Room; the Chapel Royal; the Grand Staircase**

Remarkable indeed. Built for Henry VIII on the site of a hospital for leprous women, the palace was completed between 1531 and 1536. A fire in 1809 consumed a quarter of it, and succeeding monarchs have left their mark on what remained, but the face that it shows to the world is distinctively Tudor. And though the visiting season has now finished for this year (see the box on p50 for how to find out about future dates), let us slip inside and take a virtual tour.

In the Lower Corridor, we find a portrait of the hapless Charles I, on trial as a "tyrant, traitor, murderer, and a public and implacable enemy to the Commonwealth of England". The artist, Edward Bower, has captured the king's disdain for the proceedings, his refusal to acknowledge the court or to remove his hat.

On the morning of January 1649, at St James's Palace, after prayer and communion, and having taken a glass of claret and a morsel of bread, with his spaniel Rogue at his heel, Charles would walk to the scaffold outside the Banqueting House on Whitehall.

More happily, along the same corridor is a familiar face, that of the late Duke of Edinburgh, aged 96, the year he retired from official royal duties. His charisma and vital spark are captured perfectly by the Australian-born artist Ralph Heimans. ▶

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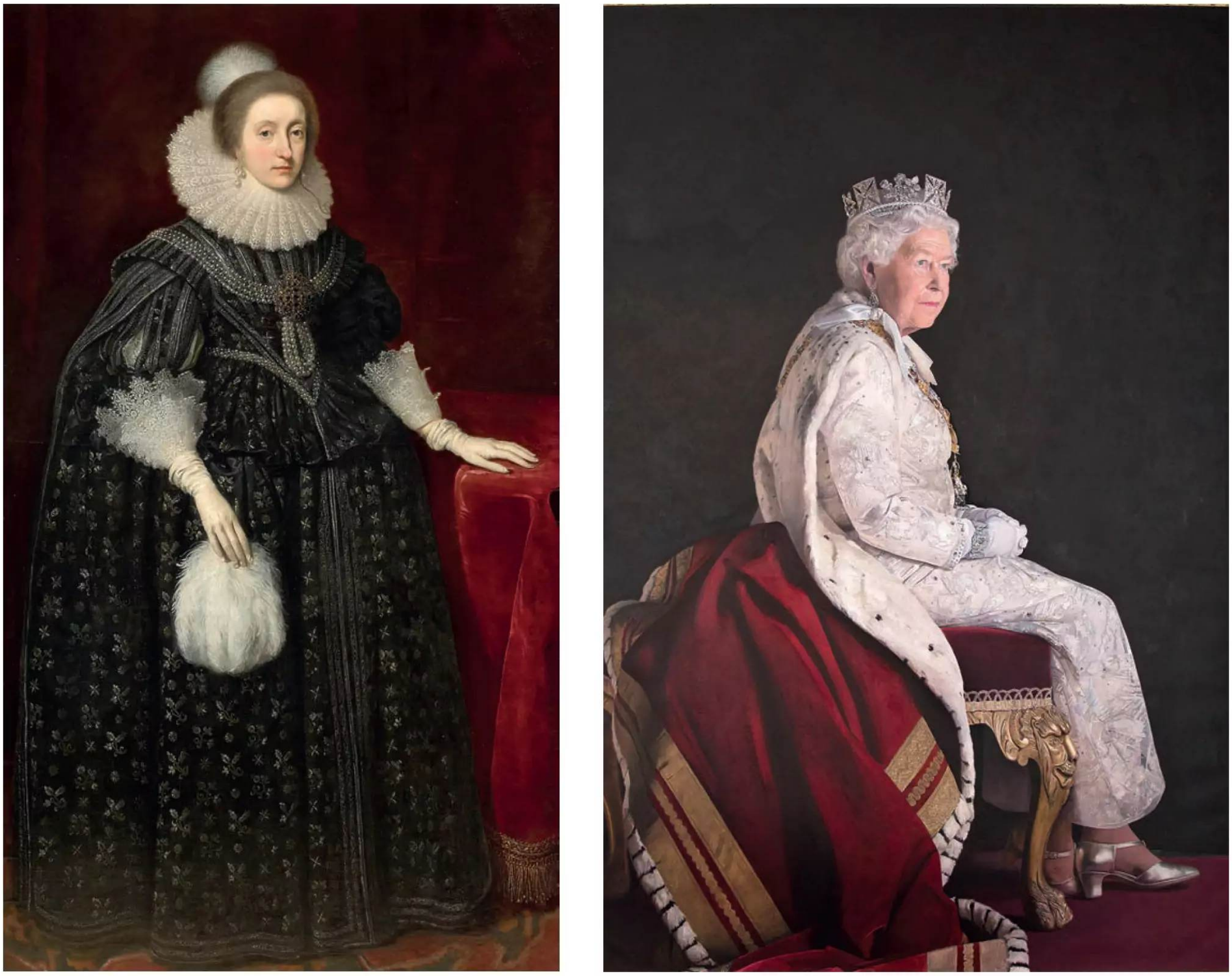

Above: Elizabeth, Queen of Bohemia **(1626–27) painted by Daniel Mytens;** ***HM Queen Elizabeth II, The Realms Portrait,*** **by Richard Stone**

In the opulent space of the Grand Staircase hangs a portrait of a seated Elizabeth II, painted by Richard Stone in 2015. She wears an ermine-lined cloak and a gold and silver diadem, but for all the finery, her gaze, in semi-profile, is entirely human.

The late Queen reigned for more than 70 years. Conversely, the somewhat austere figure in ruff and hairpiece, also displayed in this space, enjoyed a single season as Elizabeth, Queen of Bohemia, earning her the nickname the 'Winter Queen'. It is the work of the Netherlandish artist Daniel Mytens, who was appointed by Elizabeth's younger brother, Charles I, in happier times, to produce works for a gallery of family portraits.

Charles I was a noted patron of the arts. In the Tapestry Room hang survivors of a suite of nine tapestries depicting the Amours of Venus and Vulcan, which, as Prince of Wales, he ordered from the Mortlake workshops, each one an exquisite work of collaborative art. "In the early 17th century," says Sally Goodsir, Curator of Decorative Arts at the Royal Collection Trust, "tapestries were imported from the Continent, particularly from the Low Countries. This changed in 1619 when James I supported the establishment of a tapestry manufactory at Mortlake on the banks of the Thames. The weavers were Flemish and led by a German designer, Francis Cleyn. Early support from James's son, later Charles I, included this set."

Following Charles's execution, the tapestries were sold off. Queen Victoria bought back as many as she could, and asked William Morris's company to cut and rehang them. That sounds like cultural vandalism, but, says Sally, "For centuries people would rework or cut tapestries to fit new interiors, and in the 19th century this was considered a normal approach. Morris & Co retained areas of the important borders with the crossed 'C' ciphers and Prince of Wales feather."

Speaking of ciphers, a highlight of this room is a splendid Tudor fireplace, bearing the initials 'H' and 'A' entwined in a true lovers' knot, commemorating Henry VIII and Anne Boleyn, who married in 1533. In 1536 the king ordered that the executioner known as the 'Sword of Calais' should strike off her head.

Now to the Picture Gallery, where, among a wealth of paintings, one arrests our attention with its improbable, dreamlike quality. It shows Isaac Van

▶

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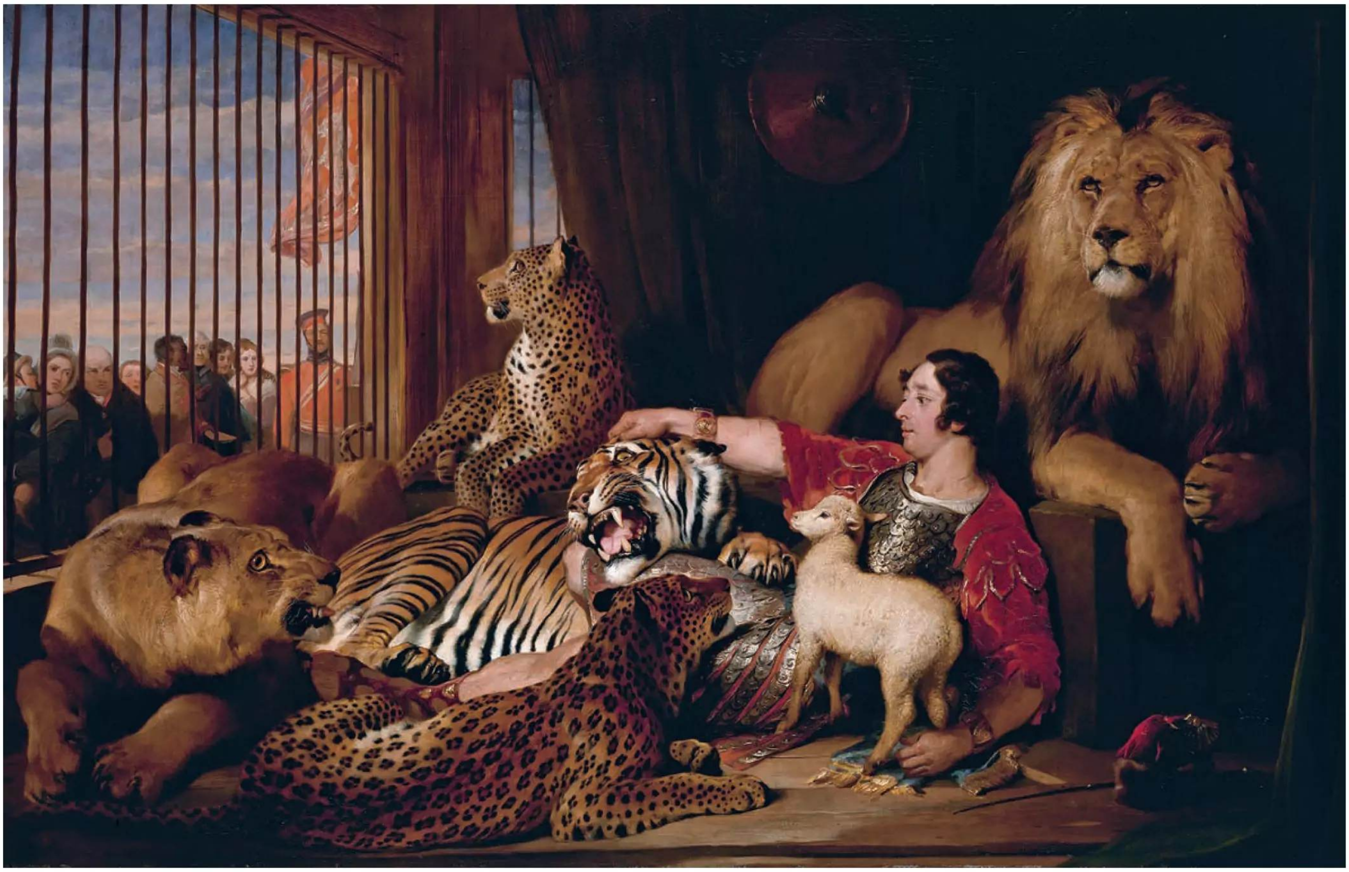

Above: **Sir Edwin Landseer's** ***Isaac Van Amburgh and his Animals***

Amburgh, the American 'Brute Tamer of Pompeii', in Roman garb, reposing with a lamb among leopards, lions and a tiger. This was painted for Queen Victoria in 1839 by Sir Edwin Landseer, before he designed the bronze lions that guard Nelson's Column.

It was in this gallery that the death of Queen Elizabeth II was officially confirmed, while Charles III made a sorrowful declaration about the death of his mother in the Throne Room. The eponymous throne is an astonishing confection of carved gilt and wood, under a canopy of embroidered silk velvet, dating from the reign of George IV. "The throne chair was used regularly throughout the 19th into the early 20th century for sovereigns to receive important ambassadors, and during Court levées, when debutantes would be presented," says Sally. "It was most recently centre stage (although not sat upon) when His Majesty signed the papers of accession and held his first Privy Council."

Above the fireplace is the Coronation portrait of George IV, painted by Sir Thomas Lawrence, greatest portraitist of his generation. It shows the dandyish George in sumptuous robes that he himself designed, cutting a fine figure, before his descent into gluttony, depravity and morbid obesity. George so loathed his estranged wife, Caroline of Brunswick, that, upon his Coronation in 1821, she was barred from Westminster Abbey and did not get to see the lavish pageantry or be crowned Consort.

Dynastic royal marriages were always a gamble. In the Chapel Royal, beside the Palace Gatehouse, if you look up at the exquisite ceiling you will spot, again, an 'H' and 'A'. This 'A', however, denotes Anne of Cleves, Henry's fourth wife, to whom he was not attracted ("I like her not," he famously muttered on first meeting her). They wed in January 1540; in July the marriage was dissolved.

By contrast, when Queen Victoria married her cousin Prince Albert of Saxe-Coburg and Gotha, in the Chapel, she was smitten and would bear him nine children. In 1837 she chose Buckingham Palace for her London residence, but St James's remains home to several members of the Royal Family and their offices, to the Royal Collection Trust, the Yeomen of the Guard, the King's Watermen, the Gentlemen at Arms, and more. The Chapel Royal hosts regular services, open to the public, as well as special services, such as the Christening of Prince George in October 2013 – and so unfolds the next chapter of royal history. B

BOOK AHEAD

St James's Palace is open on selected dates for guided tours. To find out about upcoming dates, sign up to the palace's newsletter at *rct.uk/about-royal-collection-trust/enewsletter*

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PIPE DREAMS

The bagpipes are the sound of Scotland the world over. But how did the pipes' distinctive drone become so deeply connected to Scottish identity?

WORDS **JANICE HOPPER**

Think of Scotland and, chances are, the bagpipes come to mind, perhaps played by a kilted piper on the shores of a misty loch. And this is no cliché: in Scotland, the bagpipes are revered and celebrated, from the Borders to the remotest Highlands and islands.

Every August, the world's most talented pipers flock to compete in Glasgow's annual World Pipe Band Championships. Seven thousand pipers and drummers (approximately 204 bands from 13 countries) gather across two days on Glasgow Green, an event which attracts some 35,000 spectators. But behind the colourful modern competition there's a rich heritage playing its tune in the background.

You can learn more at the National Piping Centre's Museum of Piping, also in Glasgow. Visitors see pipes from all over the world and discover how the instrument adapted across borders and centuries. Bagpipes were played in Europe as early as the 9th century, developing differently in each country, from the Hungarian *duda* to the Polish *koza*.

The famous Scottish Highland bagpipe has two tenor drones and a bass drone, tuned an octave apart. The bag is traditionally made from sheepskin and sealed with a top-secret 'seasoning' to ensure it's airtight. Traditionally, the reeds are crafted from cane, although modern reeds are often synthetic. And that distinctive wail is shaped by the melodic pipe or 'chanter'.

But it's not all about the pipes: the pipers' dress is critical too. The full outfit can include a tartan kilt, sporran, jacket, shirt, tie, Glengarry hat and ghillie brogues. Socks are accessorised with decorative ribbons or 'flashes', and perhaps even a dagger, the *sgian dubh* (pronounced 'skene dhu').

The bagpipes started life as a rudimentary instrument, portable and festive. The instrument had a reputation for being subversive: it was widely considered pagan, and even demonic. The polar opposite of a harp plucked by angels, the bagpipes were historically associated with licentiousness, played uproariously in sinful taverns and at bawdy celebrations. Even 'Scotland's bard', Robert Burns, portrayed the Devil as a piper, rousing the

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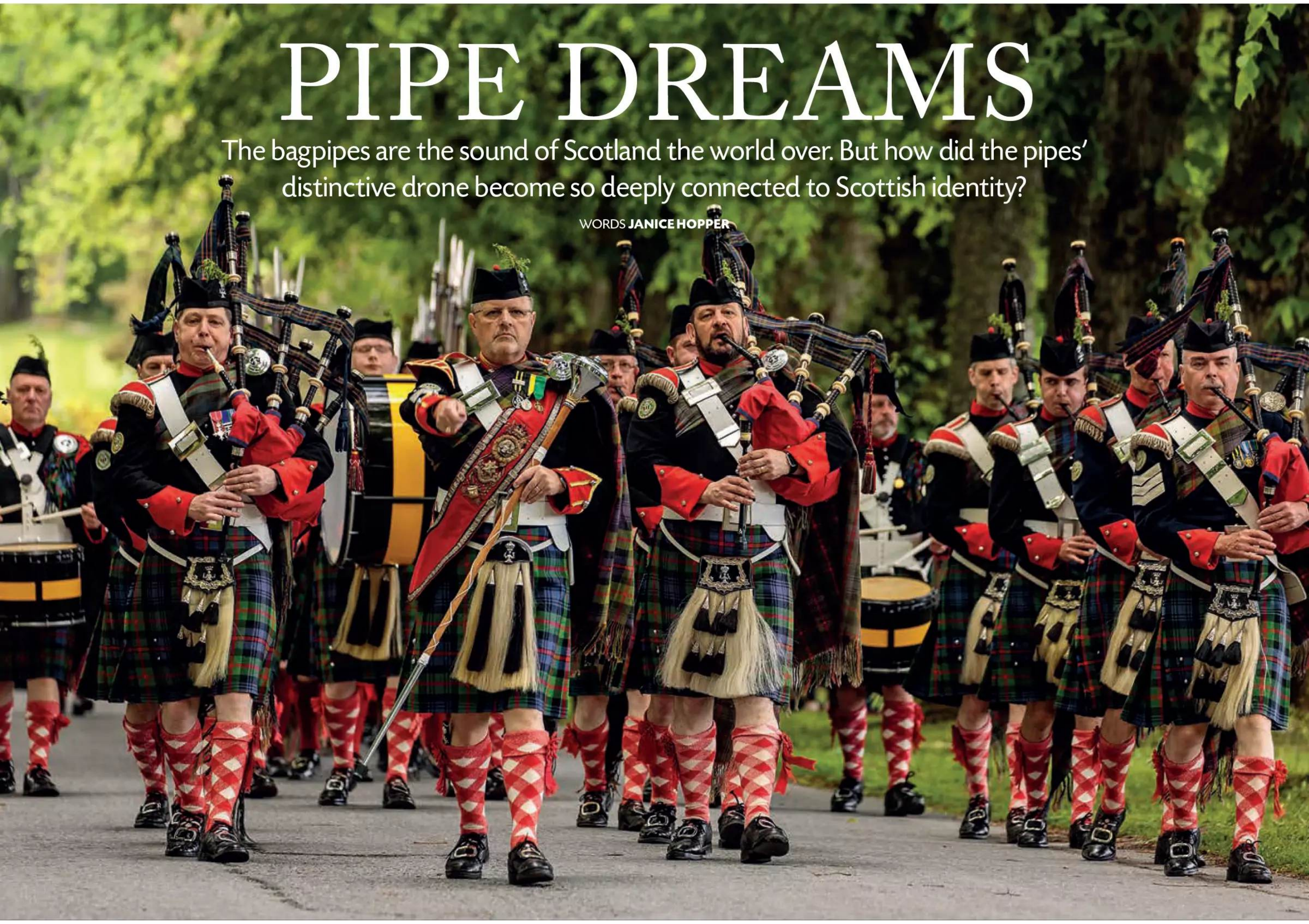


Below: **Atholl Highlanders Parade, Atholl Gathering, Blair Castle**

PHOTO: © IMAGE PROFESSIONALS GMBH/ALAMY

witches into a sensuous dancing trance in his much-loved poem *Tam o' Shanter*:

There sat auld Nick, in shape o' beast;
A towzie tyke, black, grim, and large,
To gie them music was his charge:
He screw'd the pipes and gart them skirl,
Till roof and rafters a' did dirl.

The pipes are also closely linked with the Scottish clan system, with the stirring drone and skirl piping men into battle and bringing a certain dignity and ceremony to clan events such as funerals. But the bagpipes' reputation suffered a blow after the final fall of the Jacobites at Culloden in 1746. The 'civilised' Redcoats were the victors; the 'wild' Highlanders the fallen enemy. Debate rages on to this day, but while the pipes weren't explicitly banned post-war, much of the 'unruly' Highland Scots' way of life – their culture, arms, dress, language – were either directly curtailed through the Act of Proscription or tarnished through association with the vanquished Highlanders.

Ironically it was the fighting spirit of the pipes that brought the instrument a new prominence and prestige, through their association with the British Army, as Scottish regiments often boasted their own pipe band. During the Battle of Dargai Heights in what is now Pakistan in 1897, Piper George Findlater of the Gordon Highlanders continued to play the regimental march on his bagpipes despite having been shot in both feet and being unable to stand; he was awarded the Victoria Cross by Queen Victoria for his bravery.

The pipes are endlessly versatile, able to lift the rafters with toe-tapping reels as well as play sombre laments

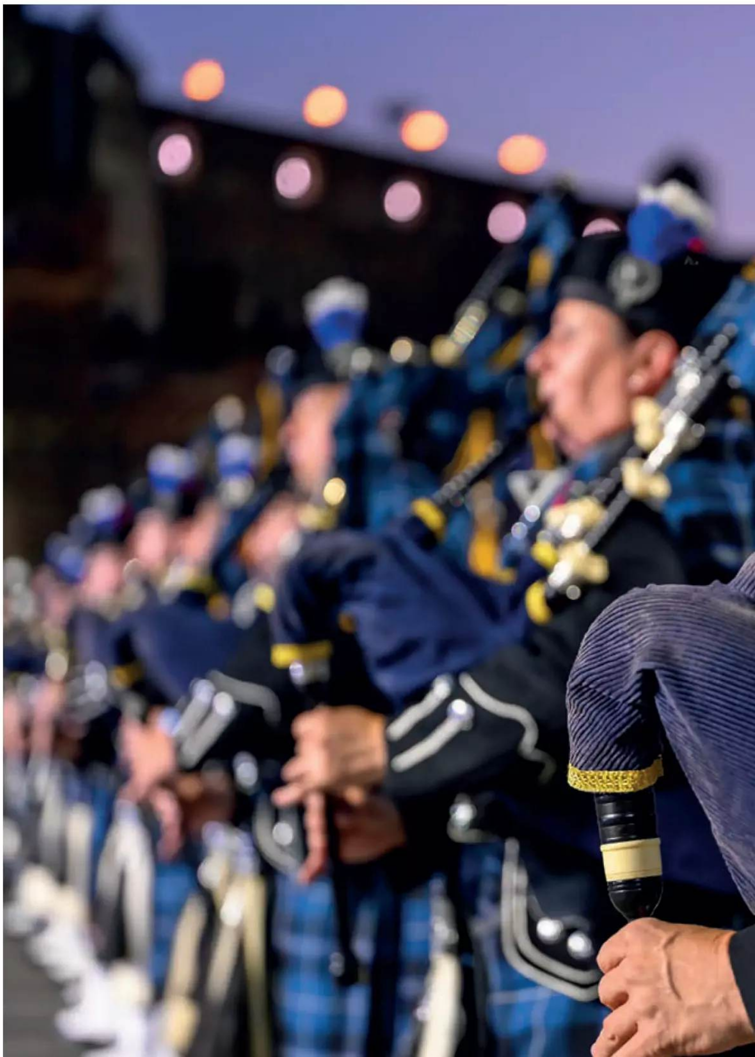
Even in surrender, the pipes lifted the spirits: when the Allies left Malaysia in the Second World War, crossing into Singapore, the 2nd Battalion Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders played the pipes as they crossed towards an uncertain future. Today, the pipes' military associations are central to The Royal Edinburgh Military Tattoo, which celebrates its 75th anniversary in Edinburgh this August.

To enjoy the bagpipes in a 'clan' setting, choose from a varied calendar of Scottish Highland Games, among which the Atholl Gathering, held at Blair Castle in May, stands out. It's kicked off by the Atholl Highlanders – the only private army in Europe, personal bodyguard to the Chief of the Clan Murray – performing a rousing 'March On' led by pipes and drums.

As for the music played at these events, the pipes are endlessly versatile. One minute they can lift the rafters with *ceòl beag* ('small' or popular music for dancing and

Below, clockwise from left: **Handmade bagpipes with woollen tartan; The Royal Edinburgh Military Tattoo; World Pipe Band Championships; National Piping Centre in Glasgow**

PHOTOS: © IRINA NAOUMOVA/ALAMY/THE ROYAL EDINBURGH MILITARY TATTOO/ GRANT PATERSON/VISIT SCOTLAND/NATIONAL PIPING CENTRE



entertainment) – from graceful strathspeys to toe-tapping reels. Then they can switch to *ceòl mòr* ('big' or classical pieces), for rich, soaring salutes and sombre laments.

The long, continuous drone of the bagpipes can't fail to tug at the heartstrings, and their haunting sound can often be heard at funerals. Nine pipers from the Black Watch Band performed at the State Funeral of President John F Kennedy in November 1963, while more recently, a lone piper concluded the funeral of Queen Elizabeth II: a fitting tribute to a sovereign who ended her days at Balmoral Castle in Aberdeenshire.

The British monarchy's passion for the pipes has certainly helped elevate the instrument over the centuries. Queen Victoria first came across bagpipes in the 1840s, taking such a liking to them that she employed her own personal piper. All of her successors have followed suit, and by the time of Elizabeth II the 'Piper to the Sovereign' served a notably personal role, waking the queen every morning at 9 o'clock, a tradition upheld by her son King Charles.

Whether acting as the monarch's personal alarm clock, striking fear into the enemy on the battlefield, or rousing the assembled crowds at a Highland gathering, the sound of the bagpipes has long carried the spirit of Scotland's past and present: an enduring symbol of the country's history and identity. B

PIPING EVENTS & ACTIVITIES

If you'd like to hear the pipes played in person, or even have a go yourself, visit Scotland in the summer months:

Play the pipes 'Meet the Piper' tours at Glasgow's National Piping Centre run on Fridays and Saturdays at noon until 9 August. The piper leads a guided tour of the museum, charting the history of piping. Visitors then try their hand at the chanter, the starting instrument for the pipes; the resulting cacophony is a memorable experience. *thepipingcentre.co.uk*

See marching bands in action The Royal Edinburgh Military Tattoo sees military bands from across the world perform against the backdrop of Edinburgh Castle in a spectacular display of music and military pageantry (1–23 August). *edintattoo.co.uk*

Battle of the bagpipes Pipers and drummers compete every year at the World Pipe Band Championships in Glasgow (15–16 August). *theworlds.co.uk*

Highland fling Bagpipes are a key part of Scotland's summer Highland Games, featuring in parades and pipe band competitions. *www.rshga.org*

Treasure islands

Whether built as a line of defence, a display of status or simply as somewhere to keep the swans, a castle moat is a sight to behold

WORDS **NEIL JONES**

PHOTO: © FADI AL-BARGHOUTHY/ALAMY

Left: **The fairytale Bodiam Castle and its moat**

Who can resist the sight of a castle encircled by a moat: sturdy walls mirrored in glinting waters on a summer's day? William Shakespeare certainly couldn't, waxing lyrical in his play *Richard II* to evoke "this scepter'd isle" of England set in a silver sea "as a moat defensive to a house".

Moated castles are the very essence of impregnable retreats, though with the clamour of siege warfare long faded, for many of us it's their romantic aesthetic that most captivates.

The word 'moat' is adapted from the old French 'motte' meaning mound or hillock (as in the central mounds of Norman Conquest fortresses) but it gradually came to be used to describe the excavated ditches around castles, particularly when medieval builders, ever keen to improve defences, filled the ditches with water. Wet moats made it far more difficult for attackers to approach, to erect siege towers or to use battering rams, while tunnelling to undermine castle walls became almost impossible.

Moats could also be stocked with fish to provide food for the larder: King Edward I, for example, had a large number of young pike sent to be farmed in the moat of the Tower of London in 1292.

Edward's moat at the Tower, at least 124 feet wide, was completed in the 1270s and took water from the Thames, the ebb and flow controlled by sluice gates. Sadly, it later became a stagnant health hazard and had to be drained in the 1840s, leading to its use for growing vegetables, including during the Second World War, when ▶

crops were sown by the Beefeaters themselves. More recently, the moat has been planted with wildflowers grown from 20 million seeds to create a vivid, biodiverse habitat – in a far cry from its original defensive purpose, you can follow a peaceful half-mile circular walk that weaves through swathes of poppies, cosmos and cornflowers.

Leaving aside the insalubrious problem that garderobes (medieval loos) often drained or were emptied into moats, there is much to admire in these defences as feats of engineering. At their simplest, they were filled with water from natural sources such as springs and rivers, and controlled by dams and sluices, with artificial lakes sometimes created too. Water-retaining clay was the best terrain, as porous rock required expensive lining.

The artificial lakes and moat complex at Caerphilly Castle in south Wales have been described as the most elaborate water defences in Britain. Second only to Windsor Castle in size, the whole fortification stretches over some 30 acres. The castle was begun in 1268 by the powerful Marcher (border) lord Gilbert de Clare – known as Red Gilbert thanks to his shock of red hair – on a natural gravel bank in a river basin. Despite

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Clockwise from right: **Caerphilly Castle in the summer sun; redbrick Herstmonceux in East Sussex; the atmospheric ruin of Caerlaverock Castle; flowers in full bloom in the Tower of London moat**

PHOTOS: © PETER HAWKINS/TONY WATSON/IMAGEBROKER.COM GMBH & CO.KG/ ALAMY/RICHARD LEA-HAIR/HISTORIC ROYAL PALACES

From top: **Leeds Castle in the morning mist; springtime at Ightham Mote**

Henry VIII loved Leeds Castle in Kent so much that he turned it from a fortified stronghold into a royal palace

interruptions by native Welsh prince Llywelyn ap Gruffudd, as well as later rebels against English rule, Caerphilly would be the country's first concentric castle to be built from scratch. A formidable array of towers, gatehouses and drawbridges connected – and could disconnect – different parts.

Caerphilly Castle withstood Welsh attacks in 1294 and 1316, while in 1326 Edward II, on the run from his estranged wife Isabella and her lover Roger Mortimer, sought refuge here. When his supporters surrendered to Isabella's siege in 1327 it was found that Edward, already fled elsewhere, had left half his treasure and clothes behind. Civil war gunpowder bequeathed the castle its iconic leaning tower, and the whole place later mouldered, but now in the care of Cadw (the Welsh Government's environment service), it's acclaimed as one of the most spectacular military ruins in the world.

Another superb concentric castle looked after by Cadw is at Beaumaris on Anglesey, its broad moat supplied by waters of the Menai Strait. The last of Edward I's strongholds built during and after his conquest of Wales, it was never finished but was considered impregnable – though this was never put to the test.

In Scotland, meanwhile, border conflicts saw Edward I lead his army to attack Caerlaverock Castle in 1300. A contemporary French account declared it "so strong a castle, that it did not fear a siege ... it had good walls, and good ditches filled to the edge with water". In fact, after fierce exchanges of stones and arrows, the small garrison surrendered within two days to the much greater might of the English forces. Battered by subsequent 17th-century conflict, Caerlaverock nevertheless remains a hugely atmospheric fortress, its unusual triangular shape unique among British castles.

Among the most-photographed British castles is Bodiam, surrounded by an artificial lake created and fed by the River Rother in East Sussex. It was built in the ▶

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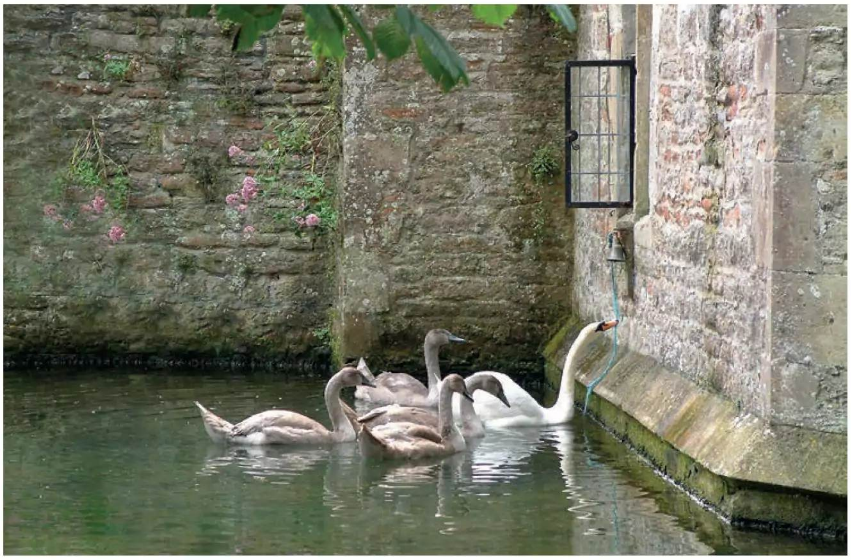

From top: **The medieval Oxburgh Hall; swans in the moat at the Bishop's Palace in Wells have learned to ring a bell when they want food**

1380s by military veteran Sir Edward Dallingridge at a time when invasion by France was feared, though the imposing structure was as much to demonstrate his prestige and status as it was about defence. Rising sheer above its watery mirror, framed by trees, it quite simply dazzles.

Turning even more to the fairytale, Leeds Castle in Kent stands on two islands in the River Len, the original Norman idea being that the drawbridge to the keep on the smaller island (now home to the Gloriette) could be drawn up if the castle came under attack, thus isolating it from other buildings on the larger island. For nearly 300 years it was in royal ownership – Henry VIII loved the castle so much that he turned it from a fortified stronghold into a royal palace – and from the 19th century it was transformed again, into one of England's great country houses, playing host to many a glamorous guest.

Also in Kent, Hever Castle, famous as the childhood home of Anne Boleyn, is really an enchanting, moated fortified manor house. One early owner, Sir Roger Fiennes, treasurer to the household of Henry VI, was also owner of another moated castle: Herstmonceux in East Sussex. Fashionably constructed in brick in the 1440s, it looked formidable but at heart was a palatial residence, surrounded by beautiful gardens which, flower-filled and roamed by peacocks, are still worth a visit today.

Indeed, from the 14th and 15th centuries, the fortification of manor houses and mansions by the lesser nobility often incorporated moats, making for some of the country's most idyllic scenes. Among them are Ightham Mote in Kent, whose moat was more likely designed to deter robbers than any military assault and where in the 19th century young gentlemen of the household fished from the windows; redbrick Oxburgh Hall in Norfolk, completed in 1482 for rising star at court, Sir Edmund Bedingfeld, and where members of the Bedingfeld family still live; Broughton Castle in Oxfordshire, whose neglect in the 19th century led to a 12-day sale of contents, with the last lot being the swans on the moat. Since restored, the house remains the ancestral home of the Fiennes family.

For quirky tradition, visit the Bishop's Palace in Wells, Somerset, built in the 1200s and where a Victorian bishop's daughter taught swans on the moat to tug a rope to ring a bell at the gatehouse for food. And for magical charm, seek out Scotney Castle in Kent, where in the 19th century Edward Hussey III made the ruined medieval moated castle a focal point in his Picturesque landscape garden. From turreted ruins to romantic gems, every moated castle and manor has a tale to tell.

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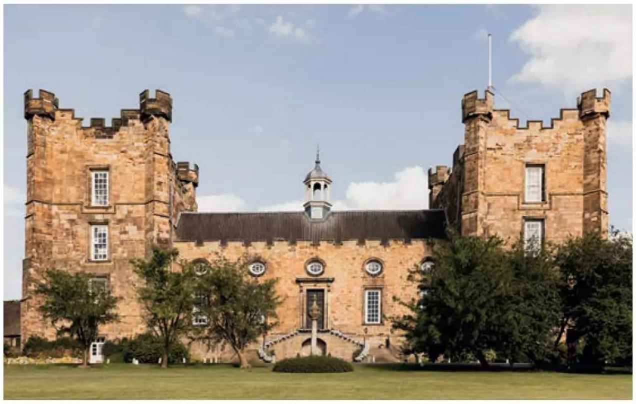

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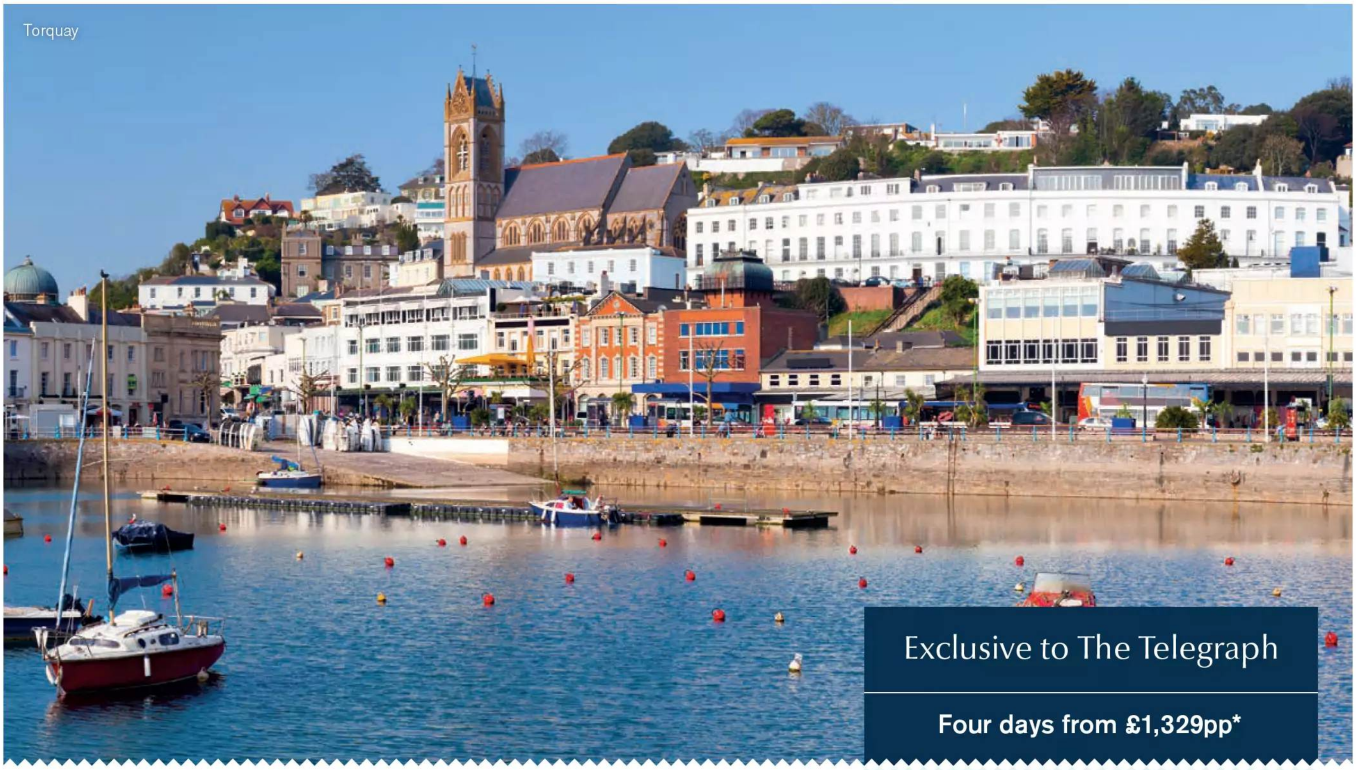
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Dr Lucy Worsley until recently was joint chief curator at Historic Royal Palaces and is the author of several books. She has presented TV shows for various channels.

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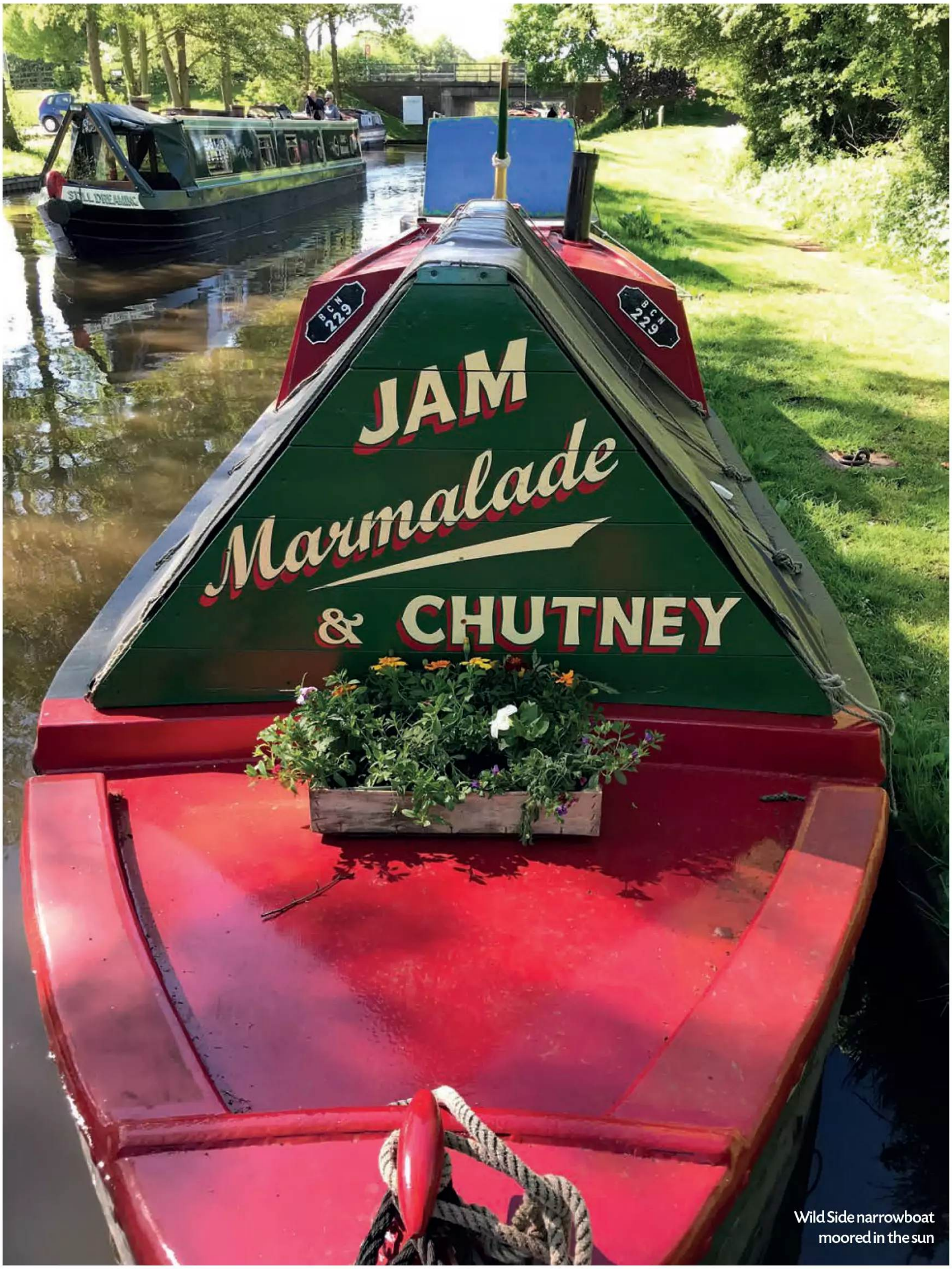
JAM
Marmalade
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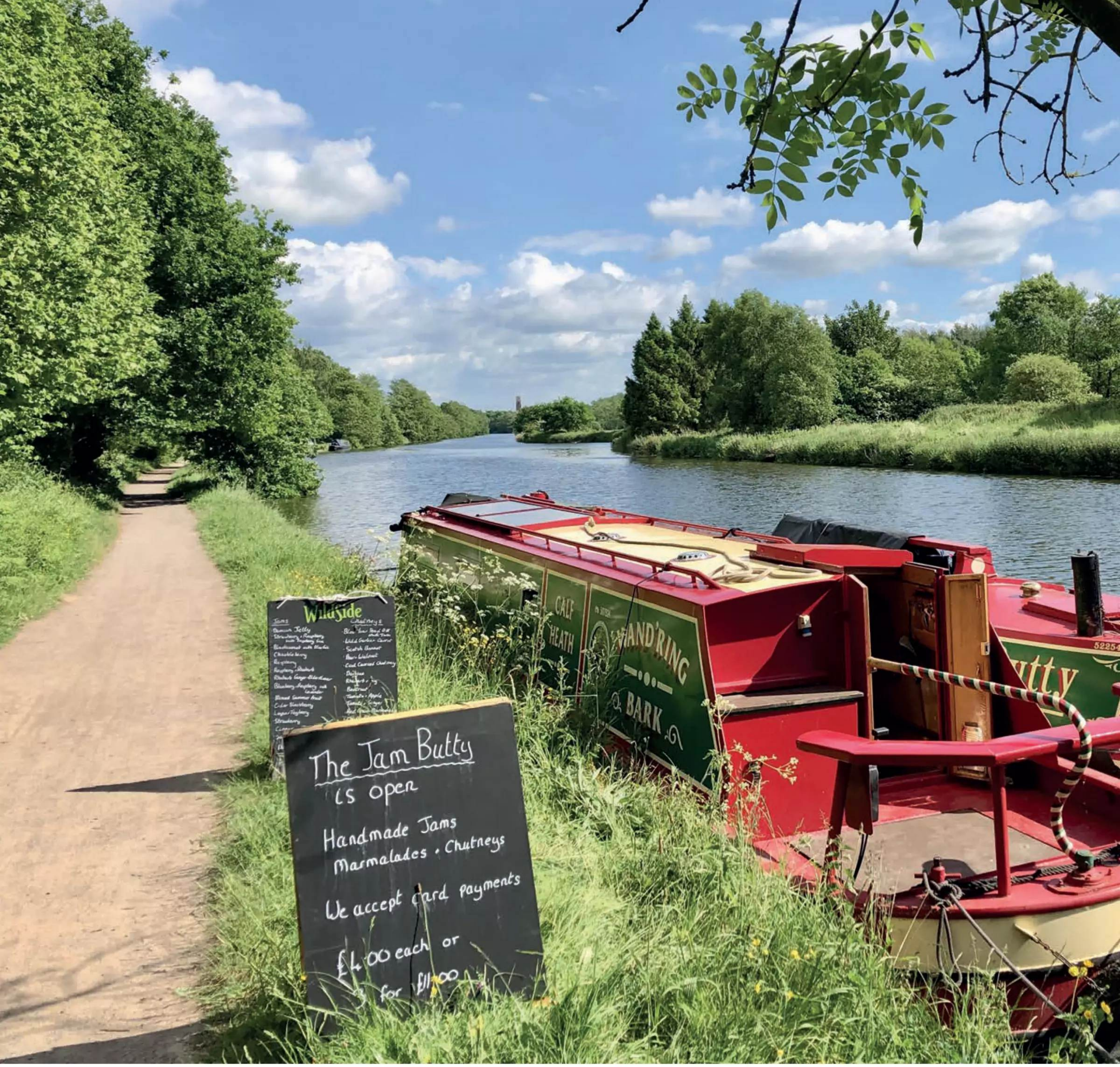
STILL DREAMING

Wild Side narrowboat moored in the sun

HAPPY WANDERERS

Meet the travelling jam makers who combine a love of cooking with a passion for narrowboats

WORDS **ROSE SHEPHERD**



From early summer, when fuchsia-pink Rosa rugosa – the Japanese or beach rose – garlands the hedgerows, Helen and Andy Tidy will moor their canal boat, step onto the towpath and, braving the thorns, start picking. Officially classified as 'invasive', the rose was brought from Japan in 1796, escaped into the wild and has since run rampant. "They grow pretty much anywhere," says Helen. "They're big, blowsy blooms with a glorious, intense scent" – perfect, then, for making rose-petal jelly.

In their narrowboat *Wand'ring Bark* (from Shakespeare's Sonnet 116 – 'Let me not to the marriage of true minds/Admit impediments…'), the couple are a familiar sight to fellow boaters as they ply the Midland waterways, puttering along at sedate 2.3mph, giving a new meaning to the term 'slow food'. In tow, laden with jars, is a second boat, *The Jam Butty*, a witty play on words (a butty is an unpowered narrowboat – and, to folk from northern England, a sandwich).

Thirteen years ago, Andy and Helen launched Wild Side Preserves, selling artisan jams, jellies, chutneys and vinegars at festivals and floating markets, using produce foraged from nature's larder, picked from abandoned lockkeepers' gardens or donated by 'fruit friends' who have a glut of something. They also harvest rhubarb, boysenberries, tayberries and loganberries from the

From left: **Handmade preserves for sale; on board and making jam**

PHOTO: © SUSSIE BELL

garden of their small bricks-and-mortar home in West Midlands, where they overwinter, frantically making up batches of autumn fruit preserves – apples, pears, plums, sloes – and catching up with friends.

Wild Side came about through happenstance, a marriage of true enthusiasms, though not without impediment. "My dad was a passionate boater back in the 1960s," says Andy. "So I've been around boats since I was a child, steering them since I was six or seven."

Whereas, says Helen, she grew up beside the Grand Union Canal – the principal navigable waterway between London and the Midlands, in the 1970s, before the transformation of Britain's canals from industrial-era relics to places for life and leisure. "It was a horrible, polluted ditch and I couldn't comprehend why anyone would want to spend time on it. But I finally caved, we had a four-day break, and our children loved it. They're autistic and they liked the routine, the sameness of their surroundings, while the outside was constantly changing."

After hiring boats for four years, in 2004 they remortgaged their house and bought *Wand'ring Bark* for holidays and weekends. Andy continued with his job as a bank manager. Helen was studying for a Masters degree in Shakespeare, planning to become an academic researcher. Then, in an instant, in 2010, it all changed. On a freezing November day, she slipped in the snow and hit her head, shattering her cheekbone. "I crushed my face, which distorted my vision so badly, for two and a half years I couldn't even read." Still only in her forties, she found her career plans had gone "out the window".

But sweet are the uses of adversity. By way of occupational therapy, she began foraging, making jam with the fruits of her labours. "I've always enjoyed cooking, and I've always enjoyed the outdoors. When I was a child, my mum went through a phase of making wine from hedgerow fruit, and I did a lot of foraging with her, so I had some idea about what was available."

Helen took a foraging course, the two sought permission to forage on land owned by the Canal & River Trust, Andy took early retirement, and they now turn over some 5,000 jars annually. "We'll never make our fortune," Helen laughs, "but it's great."

The foraging year begins in March with the tender stems of wild garlic that they use in their hugely popular wild garlic and carrot chutney. Next come cherries, just ▶

From top: **Andy and Helen on *The Jam Butty;* Wild Side jam, packed with bounty foraged from the towpath hedgerows**

there for the picking – so long as you move fast. Helen tells the story of how they tied up one evening under a tree bejewelled with cherries. All night they heard a tapping on the roof of the boat, and in the morning, they emerged to find it covered with cherry stones, baked on by the sun. Thanks, squirrels!

The couple must get along very well, since, presumably, when living on the boat, they spend all day together at close quarters. "Yes and no," Helen responds. "When we're travelling, Andy will be out the back steering all day, and I just pop out if there's locks, so we can actually go all day without seeing each other."

The gentle pace of life and pastoral scenery on the water must be soothing to the soul. Even when passing through built-up areas, boaters will see a different side of town and city. "The canals are a watery corridor of nature right the way from Birmingham to Wolverhampton," Andy explains. "It's about 18 miles between the two cities and it's urban all the way, but it's in the cutting, and you can travel all day and probably see twenty people. Not boaters, people walking on the towpath. It's a very isolated spot."

Another pleasure for Helen is to experiment with new combinations. Some of her more unusual jams include chuckleberry, blackcurrant and sloe gin, and rhubarb and ginger with elderflower.

Any failures? "Yes. I flirted with the idea of vegetable jams. My courgette jam has gone down in the annals of history." And greatest hits? Damson, they say. "And we've won awards for our marmalades, medlar jelly, and strawberry and raspberry jam made with raspberry gin."

One change is afoot. At the end of the season, they'll part ways with *The Jam Butty* and *Wand'ring Bark* in favour of a single, longer, more manoeuvrable boat. "There are various waterways we can't go on. The rivers are a particular problem, because with *Butty* we haven't got the engine power to travel against the current." A bigger boat will allow them to extend their range and embark upon new adventures.

It sounds like an enviable existence. "It's pretty perfect for us. There are challenges, of course, but there are with any kind of lifestyle. It's just something we really enjoy doing, and for as long as we can we'll carry on." B

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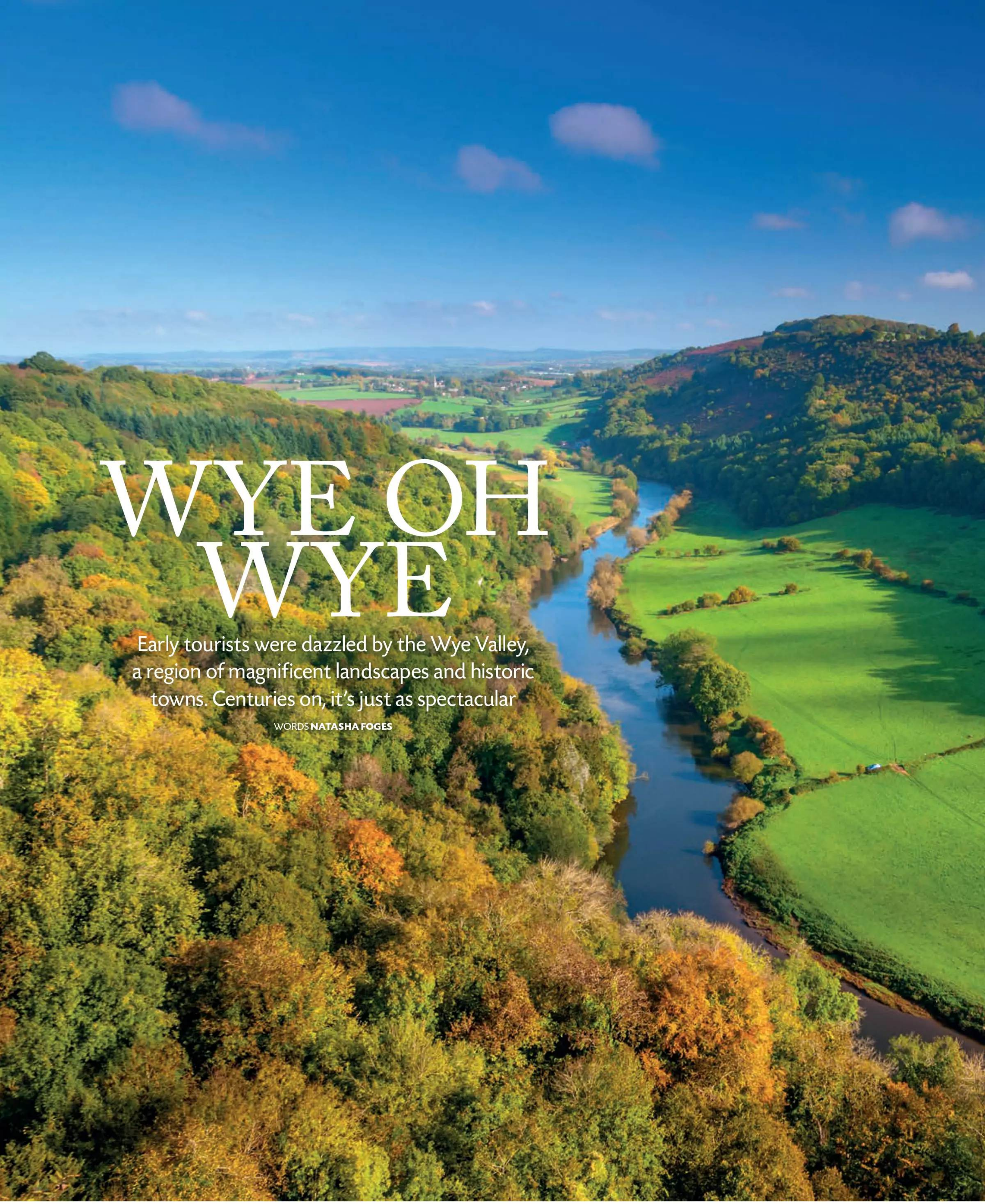
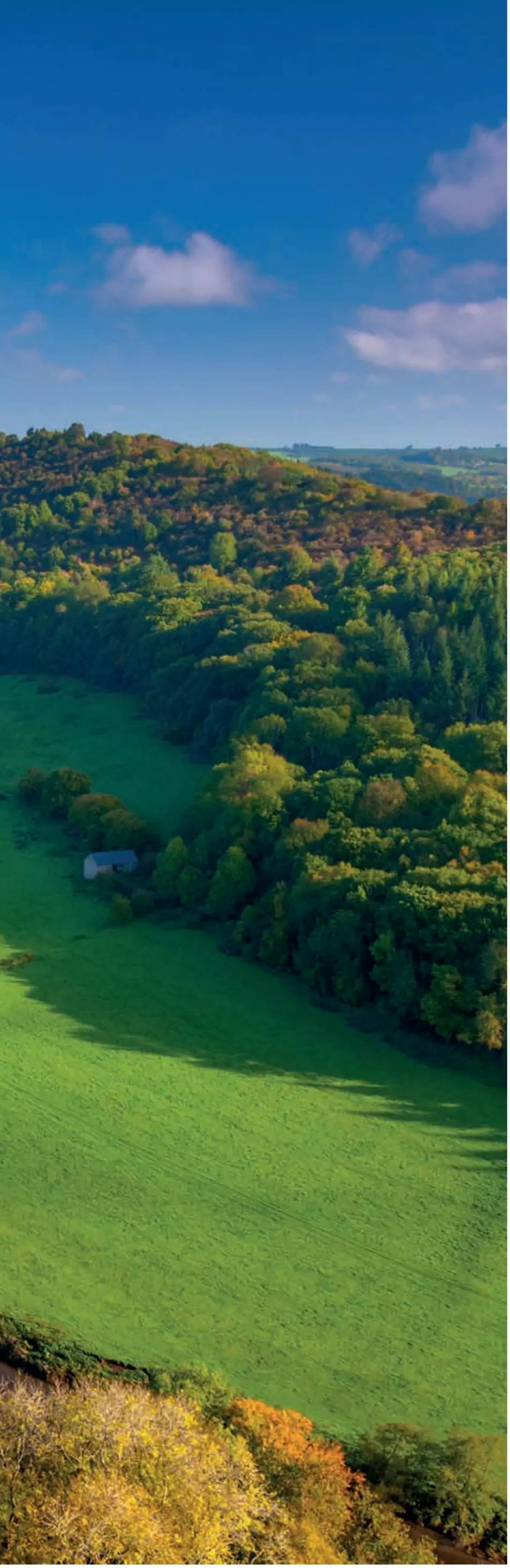


WYE OH WYE

Early tourists were dazzled by the Wye Valley, a region of magnificent landscapes and historic towns. Centuries on, it's just as spectacular

WORDS **NATASHA FOGES**



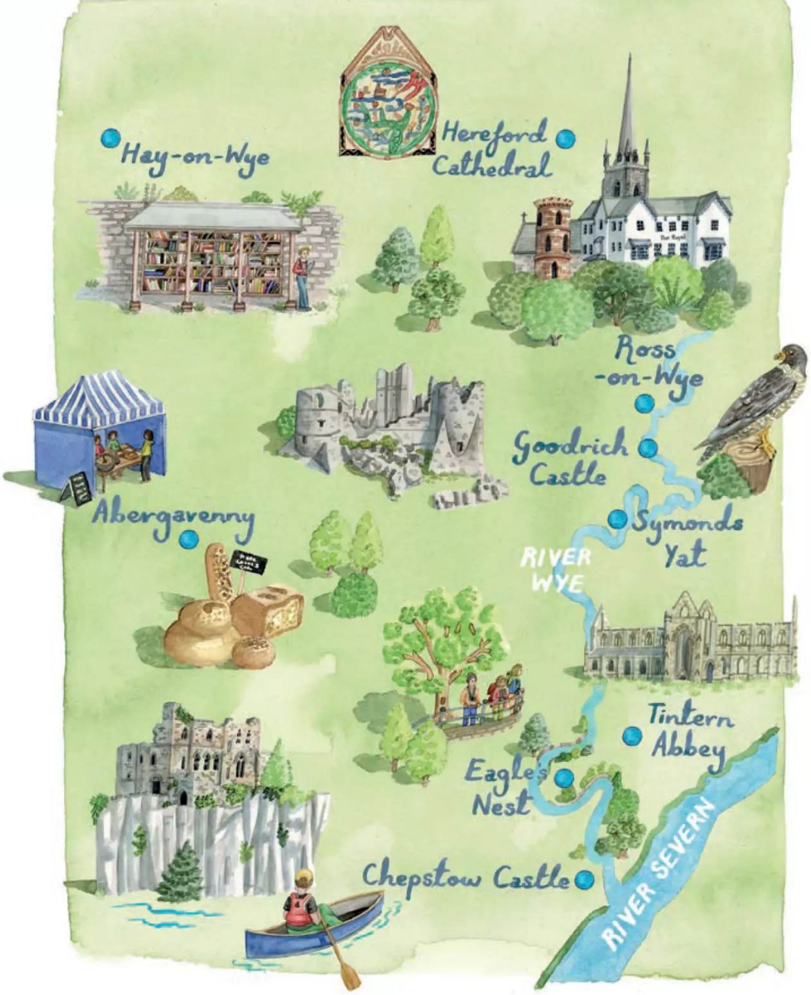

Hay-on-Wye
Hereford Cathedral
Ross-on-Wye
Goodrich Castle
Abergavenny
Symonds Yat
RIVER WYE
Tintern Abbey
Eagle's Nest
Chepstow Castle
RIVER SEVERN

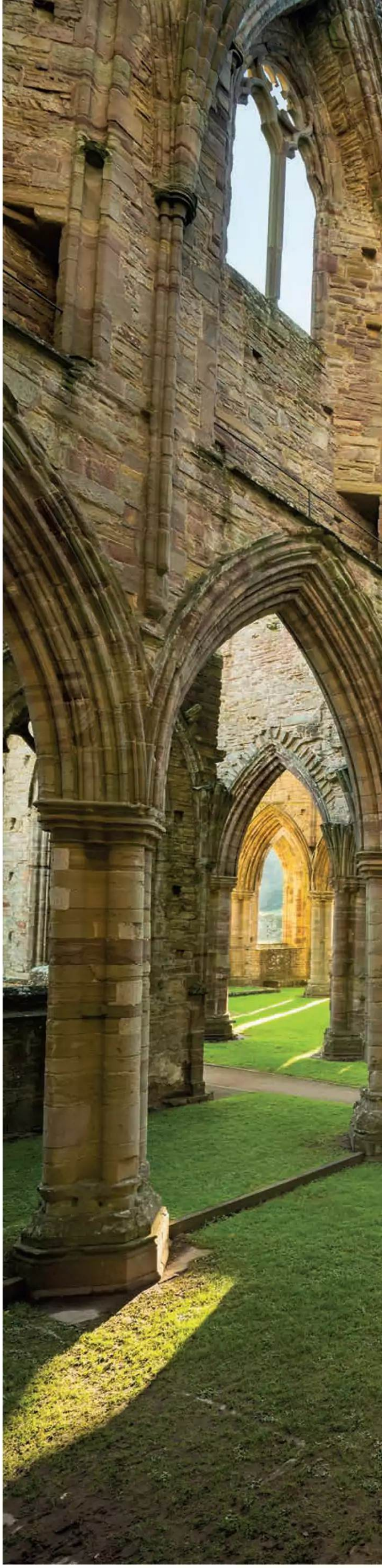
PHOTO: © JON ARNOLD IMAGES LTD. ILLUSTRATION: © LAURA HALLETT

Left: View north along the River Wye from Symonds Yat

In the summer of 1770, an Anglican vicar named William Gilpin wrote Britain's first guidebook. It wasn't about the landmarks of London, York or Edinburgh, but the Wye Valley, a then little-known region on the border of England and Wales. Inspired by a scenic boat trip that Gilpin had taken along the river – a place of romantic ruined castles, dramatic gorges and lush riverbanks – he wrote a book, *Observations on the River Wye and Several Parts of South Wales etc Relative Chiefly to Picturesque Beauty*. Despite the un-catchy title, it was a roaring success, spurring unadventurous Georgians to see the glories of the countryside in person. Inspired by this new focus on the Picturesque, an array of poets, writers and artists – including William Wordsworth and JMW Turner – flocked to the Wye Valley to write and paint.

'The Wye tour' became one of the first package holidays, following Gilpin's original course from the market town of Ross-on-Wye in the north to the mighty castle at Chepstow in the south. You can follow the same tour today in either direction, by car or on foot, with sections visitable by ▶

Clockwise, from opposite: The ruins of Tintern Abbey; medieval Goodrich Castle as seen from the air; a peregrine falcon in flight



The middle section of the valley is where the scenery is at its most ruggedly beautiful

PHOTOS: © JEROME MURRAY – CC/ALAMY/JUSTIN FOULKES/ADAM BURTON/AWL IMAGES LTD

boat, in the spirit of Gilpin's expedition. And while 21st-century visitors are perhaps not as wide-eyed as those early tourists, the Wye is as spectacular as it ever was, its banks a succession of natural and man-made beauties.

Our tour starts at mighty Chepstow Castle, one of the oldest stone castles in Wales, built in 1067 by Earl William fitz Osbern, a close ally of William the Conqueror. From its commanding perch on a limestone cliff, the castle has a strategic position on the Wye, overseeing the gateway into Wales. Originally a military stronghold, it was later a noble residence for a succession of earls.

A few miles upstream stands another spectacular ruin, Tintern Abbey. Built in 1131 by the Lord of Chepstow, Walter de Clare, it was Wales's first Cistercian abbey, led by Abbot Henry, a reformed robber who was known for his tendency to weep at the altar.

The following century, donations from wealthy local lords funded a lavish rebuilding of the original timber structure. With its soaring Gothic arches and ornate lancet window embellishing the West Front, the abbey was a haven for the monks for four centuries. During Henry VIII's Dissolution of the Monasteries, however, the roof was stripped for its lead and Tintern was left to decay, a magnificent relic of a bygone age.

You can only imagine William Gilpin's awe as he rounded a bend in the river and beheld this ivy-clad beauty for the first time. He devoted several pages of *Observations on the River Wye* to it, enthusing that it was "a very inchanting piece of ruin".

Further upstream, where the Wye meets the River Monnow, the appealing market town of Monmouth has a castle of its own, as well as the landmark Monnow Bridge with its medieval gatehouse. Monmouth's lively market takes place on Fridays and Saturdays, but for the best of the region's markets, make the short detour west to Abergavenny, a foodie destination whose festival takes over the town every September. With stalls and cookery demonstrations lining the streets, you can sample treats including homemade scotch eggs and local gin, with views of the Black Mountains all around.

Back on the Wye, the middle section of the valley is where the scenery is at its most ruggedly beautiful, with views over two stretches of the river as it cuts through steep-banked valleys. William Gilpin's book not only identified places to see, but also provided a set of rules instructing readers as to *how* to see them – ideally down low, at river level, to intensify the sense of awe. This still holds true today: take a boat trip through the scenic gorge of Symonds Yat for dramatic views at every turn, looking out for kingfishers flitting along the riverbanks, and peregrine falcons nesting in the cliffs.

For a different perspective on Symonds Yat, hike or drive to the Eagle's Nest viewpoint, which has dizzying views of the Wye as it flows in a huge loop through the wooded landscape hundreds of feet below. The Romantic ▶

poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge described the view here as "the whole world imag'd in its vast circumference"; it is just as humbling today as it was two centuries ago.

Further upstream is another of Gilpin's so-called "Grand Scenes": Goodrich Castle – a red sandstone beauty that sits in harmony with the river below and forests beyond – which he judged "correctly picturesque". You can wander the ruined battlements and inner courtyard, descend to the dungeon, and enjoy a picnic in the shade of the castle's towering walls.

Although the Wye continues to wind its "mazy course" north, at this point in our tour the focus shifts away from river towards town. Ross-on-Wye is a thriving market town whose cobbled streets are lined with historic buildings, from the Market House, built around 1650 and now home to a heritage centre and art gallery, to St Mary's church with its lofty spire. Inside the church, look out for the town's unlikely emblem – the hedgehog – carved on 17th-century family tombs. The area was once part of an ancient kingdom named Archenfield ('Land of Hedgehogs') by the Saxons. As local legend has it, Archenfield people were prickly types, but also great warriors, selected by kings to fight in battle.

Continue the history trail at Hereford Cathedral, at the heart of the county town of Hereford. One of Britain's

▶

Ross-on-Wye is a thriving market town whose cobbled streets are lined with historic buildings

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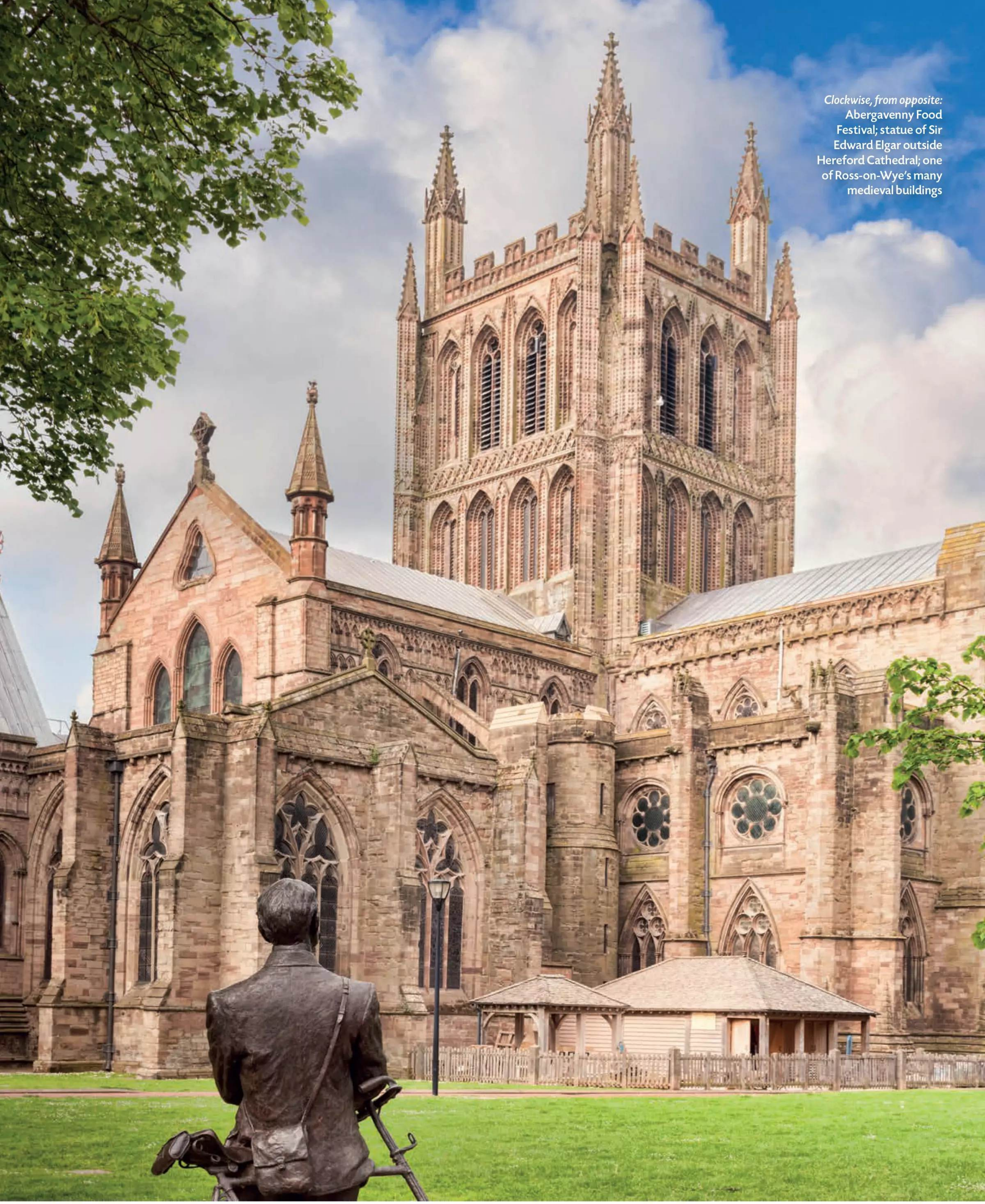

Clockwise, from opposite: Abergavenny Food Festival; statue of Sir Edward Elgar outside Hereford Cathedral; one of Ross-on-Wye's many medieval buildings

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Above: **Picturesque Hay-on-Wye, filled with second-hand bookshops and cosy cafés**

oldest cathedrals, it's home to the Mappa Mundi, a precious 14th-century map of the world that gives us a rare insight into medieval ideas of world history and geography. Made of richly illustrated calfskin, the map is framed from a Christian viewpoint, with Jerusalem at the centre, while Rome is represented as a large and important city. Hereford itself appears as a small, humble building on the River Wye (it's thought the map was made by local artisans).

Among the cathedral's other treasures are the Chained Library, created in 1611, when books were so valuable they were often chained for safe-keeping; and the brightly painted Cantilupe shrine, which holds the bones of a 13th-century bishop who became a local saint following a slew of posthumous miracles.

Finish your tour of the Wye on the Welsh side of the border, in the pretty town of Hay-on-Wye. The town is famous the world over for its many bookshops, and for its literary festival that brings in thousands of visitors every May. As well as second-hand bookshops, Hay is blessed with numerous cosy cafés – perfect spots in which to enjoy your purchases over tea and cake.

Travelling into this part of Wales, Gilpin was delighted by the green valleys but disapproved of the white houses, a colour which, he stated, "gives them a disagreeable glare". Nonetheless, a quaint whitewashed Hay-on-Wye bookshop is exactly the sort of place you might unearth an ancient copy of *Observations on the River Wye*.

"If you have never navigated the Wye, you have seen nothing" was Gilpin's bold claim to entice the cautious Georgians out of their drawing rooms; some 250 years on, we need little persuasion to follow in his footsteps.

THE PLANNER

GETTING THERE & AROUND

Take a train from London Paddington to Gloucester (1hr 45min), from where you can catch a train to Chepstow (1hr). Buses serve the region's towns and villages, but getting around is easiest by car. *thetrainline.com; traveline.info*

WHERE TO STAY

The Wye's key sights are within easy reach of the family-run Old Court Hotel near Ross-on-Wye, which is full of history: built around 1570, it was once home to John Graves Simcoe, founder of the city of Toronto, and many of its historic features remain. In Hereford, stay at the Green Dragon, a beautifully restored hotel whose history dates back 900 years, when it was an inn owned by the Bishops of Hereford. Its high-ceilinged bedrooms have a cocooning feel thanks to their outsized headboards, luxurious textiles and the plumpest of pillows. *oldcourthotel.co.uk; greendragonhotel.com*

WHERE TO EAT & DRINK

Enjoy afternoon tea at the Tudor Farmhouse, a boutique hotel in the leafy Forest of Dean – a delicious spread of homemade cakes and fluffy scones. There are historic pubs all over the region – enjoy a perfectly cooked Sunday roast overlooking the Wye at the venerable Ye Old Ferrie Inn at Symonds Yat, which has been serving food and ale on this scenic stretch since 1473.

The historic Old Court Hotel is a good option for dinner; choose between fine dining in the wood-beamed Tudor restaurant, and homemade pie or sausage and mash in the cosy, stone-walled bar. In Hereford, The Beefy Boys has legendary status for its succulent burgers made with prime Herefordshire beef. *tudorfarmhousehotel.co.uk; yeoldferrieinn.com; oldcourthotel.co.uk; thebeefyboys.com*

FURTHER INFORMATION

visitherefordshire.co.uk; visitdeanwye.co.uk

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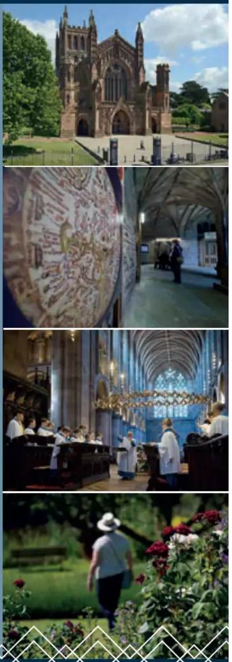

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A day with...

ELIANE ASTOR

The co-founder of Historalia Productions, known for transforming historic venues into large-scale musical spectacles, is bringing the story of England's most fascinating queen to the grounds of Hever Castle this summer

When did you first see Hever Castle?
I first visited Hever Castle in 2015 during a weekend in Kent. It was incredible to explore such a historic place, but honestly, the gardens blew me away – you rarely see gardens like that on the Continent!

You have also put on productions at your family home, Westerlo Castle in Belgium. What appeals about staging theatre performances in historical settings?
We wanted to highlight the heritage of the castle beyond just private events. My brothers and I created Historalia, which uniquely combines real figures, historic grounds, music, dance and immersive staging. As our UK director Roxana Silbert says, watching theatre outdoors on historic grounds feels like stepping into history. *Anne Boleyn: The Musical* at Hever is extra special because it's the first time we're telling a historical figure's story where she actually grew up. It's a very emotional journey – more immersive than anything we've done in Belgium.

When did the idea of staging an Anne Boleyn musical at Hever Castle come to you?
It came right after I got married at Hever in May 2017, thanks to my in-laws' connection to the place. Right after the ceremony, my brother Simon said, "We have to give a microphone to these walls and bring Anne Boleyn back here on stage." I laughed and thought, "Can I just get married first?" But that's an entrepreneur's mind – it never stops.

What is it about Anne Boleyn that captures the imagination, do you think?
She's a figure we all know changed history, yet so little concrete evidence about her remains – it leaves so much room for imagination. Our author, Rebecca Night, has worked closely with historians to ensure Anne is portrayed accurately but also from a fresh perspective.

How did you decide on a musical rather than a play?
Historalia was founded to bring history to life through music, dance and lights. A musical is the perfect medium for that – accessible and enjoyable for everyone. Plus, the audience wears headsets, so the sound feels intimate and immersive.

Are there any challenges you've faced in staging this production?
The main challenge compared to Belgium is that Hever already has daily visitors, so we're working hard not to disrupt the usual activities. But the team at Hever has been incredible – so supportive and enthusiastic, which has really lifted my energy throughout this process. From logistics to historical guidance, the Hever team have been amazing partners every step of the way. Their passion for the project is infectious.

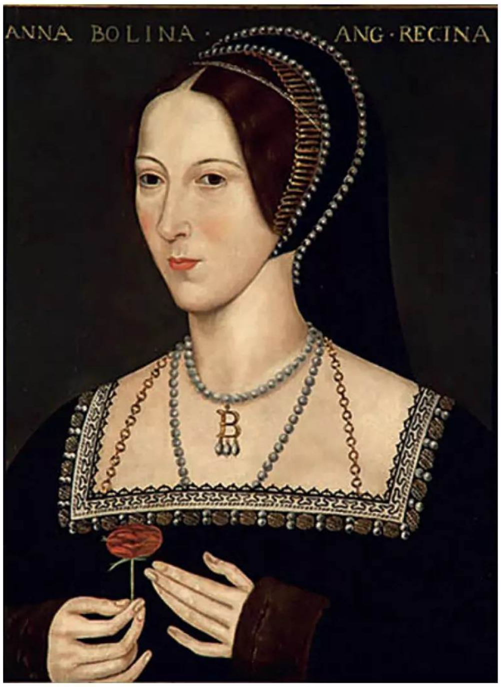
What can spectators at Anne Boleyn: The Musical expect?
Expect the unexpected! This experience is on a scale never seen before in the UK. We have a custom-built auditorium seating 1,800 people per show, over 70 actors on stage, and elements you'd never see in an indoor West End theatre. Audiences will witness history where it was actually made – and what a stage it will be! Designed by Olivier Award-winning set designer Robert Innes Hopkins, the scenography will transform the open-air theatre into an immersive Tudor world, with Hever Castle itself as the dramatic backdrop to Anne's story, while focusing on keeping all spectators covered and comfortable in case of a rainy August night!

We hope that the music, combined with the powerful lyrics, will stir deep feelings and bring Anne's story to life in a way that resonates on many emotional levels.

How do you think you'll feel on opening night?
I think I'll be overwhelmed – with pride, joy, and a lot of emotion, plus a little bit of stress, of course. Bringing Anne's story home is something really special, and I can't wait to share it with everyone.

hevercastle.co.uk

"Bringing Anne's story home is something really special, and I can't wait to share it"


ANNA BOLINA · ANG · REGINA

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STORIES FROM HOME

The Monzie Estate

Running this magical Scottish Highland estate is a labour of love for its owners

WORDS **NATASHA FOGES**

It wasn't until three months after meeting her future husband David Crichton that Alexandra discovered that his family home was a castle and he was chief of a historic Scottish clan. "In fact he never told me, his friends told me!" The Monzie Estate (pronounced without the 'z') certainly had the potential to be daunting: stretching across 4,500 acres, this storied Perthshire estate requires constant attention and boundless energy.

Once they were married, David and Alexandra moved back to Monzie and took the decision to renovate one of the derelict cottages in the grounds. It was a steep learning curve: "I'd never owned a house before – I'd always lived in city apartments!" laughs Alexandra. She proceeded to teach herself to make curtains, and took courses in upholstery and electrics.

The first cottage was opened "on a wing and a prayer". There are now six properties, including the idyllic Gardener's Cottage – in a secluded location at the end of a long drive, it's a dead ringer for the quaint cottage in the film *The Holiday* – and the striking East Gatehouse Lodge, built in the 1790s, whose turreted gothic walls guard Monzie Castle. A unique feature of the estate is its on-site joinery workshop, a business set up by David's father at a time when fitted kitchens were a novelty. The skills of the joiners, who have worked at Monzie for decades, have enabled the holiday cottages to flourish. "We're so lucky to have them," says Alexandra.

Guests at the cottages are invited to tour the castle that stands at the heart of the estate. Alexandra leads the tours herself. "I don't come from this sort of background," she says. "One of the reasons I like to meet the guests is to show that we're quite ordinary people."

Built in 1634, Monzie Castle was bought by David's family in the 1850s and was rented out as a holiday house, but in 1908 a fire destroyed the building. The family were living in California at the time and charged the esteemed Scottish architect Sir Robert Lorimer with the castle's restoration. He was given free rein – it would have taken six weeks to contact the family by post – and he chose it all, right down to the ornate light fittings and William Morris curtains. Lorimer's skills are particularly evident in the grand staircase, the elegant Morning Room, with its side turret cleverly made into a card room, and in the beautiful Drawing Room with its ornate ceiling, recently used for filming of the hit Scottish drama *Outlander*.

Reluctant to give up their life in the Californian sun, David's grandparents came back to Monzie to sell up – their travelling desk is on display at the castle – but when the First World War started, David's grandfather was killed in action, leaving his wife to bring up four children alone. "California was the Wild West at the time," explains Alexandra, so they moved to Monzie permanently.

Each generation has made efforts to make the estate more sustainable. David's grandfather set up the hydroelectric plant that powers the surrounding area; his father established the joinery, as well as the farm with its sheep and cows. "And we've gone into tourism," smiles Alexandra. Running the estate is "the hardest thing I've ever done," she says. "But can you see the views? We're so lucky."

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